

ABSTRACT

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PANTHER POWER: A LOOK INSIDE THE POLITICAL HIP HOP MUSIC OF
TUPAC AMARU SHAKUR

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In this study, seven rap songs by hip hop icon Tupac Shakur were examined to determine if the ideology of the Black Panther Party exists within the song lyrics of his politically oriented music. The study used content analysis as its methodology. Key among the Ten Point Program tenets reflected in Tupac's song lyrics were for self-determination, full employment, ending exploitation of Blacks by Whites (or Capitalists), decent housing, police brutality, education, liberation of Black prisoners, and the demand for land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice, peace, and a United Nations plebiscite.

PANTHER POWER: A LOOK INSIDE THE POLITICAL HIP HOP MUSIC OF
TUPAC AMARU SHAKUR

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BAM	Black Arts Movement
BPP	Black Panther Party
COINTELPRO	Counter Intelligence Program
CORE	Congress of Racial Equality
DJ	Disc Jockey
MC	Master of Ceremony
NY	New York City
RAM	Revolutionary Action Movement
R&B	Rhythm and Blues
SNCC	Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee
U.N.	United Nations
US	US Organization
U.S.	United States

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research is to examine hip hop music to determine the role the Black Power movement played in politicizing hip hop music through the work of Tupac Shakur. The Black Panther Party is the Black Power movement organization that the study focuses. Specifically, the study assesses the impact of ideologies advanced by the Black Panther Party to determine the historical continuity of the Black Power movement and its influence upon hip hop music. Further, the study seeks to uncover both the direct and indirect impact of the Black Power movement upon hip hop music. This will be accomplished via analyzing the lyrics of the late hip hop artist, Tupac Shakur.

The years ranging from the late 1980s through the early 1990s are often referred to as the Golden Era of Hip Hop (GEH). The era is referred to as the golden era because some of the best hip hop music was released during this period. During the GEH, hip hop artists often opted to rap about politically and/or socially conscious themes. The poetic discourse of those hip hop artists resembles the artistic production of artists from the Black Arts Movement (BAM) and the militant ideological politicking of the Black Panther Party (BPP) and other Black nationalist organizations from the Black Power movement. The ideologies that reflect each of these movements will be briefly explained with a further examination occurring in chapter three. The ideological overview shall

begin with the Black Panther Party, an organization well known for advocating armed self-defense and one proclaiming itself “the vanguard” of the Black liberation movement. Thereafter, a brief look at the Black aesthetic, the ideology, that best signifies the Black Arts Movement will occur.

The Black Panther Party, created in 1966 by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale in Oakland, California, advocated armed self-defense and restructuring American society to make it socially, politically, and economically egalitarian for all of its citizens. Originally, the group was oriented as a Black nationalist organization but later embraced revolutionary nationalism which blended socialism with nationalism. Later, the party flirted with what Huey P. Newton called “intercommunalism,” a theory which stated that because of United States (U.S.) imperialism, individual nations are no longer in existence. Therefore, nationalism cannot exist. Only individual communities exist, and they must band together to overthrow the U.S. empire.

The Panther goals are summarized in the Ten Point program written by Newton. Demands articulated in the ten-point program included full employment, exemption from military service, and the immediate end to police brutality. Additionally, the Panthers advocated revolution. The goal of the revolution was to liberate Black people and other oppressed people in the United States by overthrowing the United States government and instituting socialism. The complete list of the ten points found in the Ten Point program is as follows:

1. We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black community.
2. We want full employment for our people.
3. We want an end to the robbery by the white man of our Black community.
4. We want decent housing, fit for shelter of human beings.
5. We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present-day society.
6. We want all Black men to be exempt from military service.
7. We want an immediate end to police brutality and murder of Black people.
8. We want freedom for all Black men held in federal, state, county and city prisons and jails.
9. We want all Black people when brought to trial to be tried in court by a jury of their peer group or people from their Black communities, as defined by the Constitution of the United States.
10. We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice, and peace.
And as our major political objective, a United Nations-supervised plebiscite to be held throughout the Black colony in which only black colonial subjects will be allowed to participate, for the purpose of determining the will of Black people as their national identity.¹

Unlike the nationalism espoused by the BPP, cultural nationalism within the Black Arts movement was embraced. The Panthers vehemently denounced cultural nationalism as a viable means for liberating oppressed people worldwide because in their eyes the wearing of dashikis, Afro hair styles, and the adoption of African names would not in and of itself destroy capitalism or eradicate oppression. However, Black Arts theorist such as Larry Neal viewed Black Arts as the “aesthetic and spiritual sister” of the Black Power movement in terms of ideology.² Neal theorized that the political values of

¹ Philip S. Foner, ed. *The Black Panthers Speak* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), 2-4.

² Larry Neal, “The Black Arts Movement.” in *The Black Aesthetic*, ed. Addison Gayle (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1972), 257.

the Black Power ideology in terms of Black nationalism and self-determination were injected into the Black Arts movement. While Black art is concerned with the relationship between art and politics, Black Power focuses on the art of politics.³

The ideology of the BAM is best summed up by the doctrine of the Black aesthetic, which Maulana Karenga defines as a set of standards for the judgment of Black art. According to Addison Gayle, “more often than not, artists and intellectuals associated with the BAM were inclined to form organizations that sought to inject a Black aesthetic in everyday life. Of those who grappled with defining the black aesthetic, Addison Gayle stands out and offers one of the more poignant definitions accurately capturing the era. He insisted that the Black aesthetic “is a corrective” or “a means of helping Black people out of the polluted mainstream of Americanism . . .”⁴ Gayle’s call for an art that de-Americanizes Blacks separates the artists of the Black Arts Movement from its artistic predecessors. Both the ideology of Black aesthetic as articulated by Gayle and the ideology of the Black Panther Party as articulated by Newton call for revolution and the overthrow of the American system of oppression.

In addition to reviewing ideologies emanating from the Black Arts movement and the Black Power movement as reflected in the black aesthetic and the Black Panther Party’s Ten Point program, it must be noted that the notion of hip hop as a protest medium or tool of resistance and revolution is well in line with the history of African

³ Neal, 257.

⁴ Addison Gayle, Jr. *The Black Aesthetic* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1972), xxii.

American music. Music has always been used by African Americans to protest oppression, racial hatred, and social injustice. This was the case during the Black Power and Black Arts movements as well as throughout African American history.

Evidence of African American resistance and protest can be found in all genres of Black music, ranging from the spirituals, blues, jazz, rhythm and blues (R&B), and political hip hop music. One example would be the spirituals. At first glance, the spirituals may seem to be just religious songs. However, scholars such as by John Lovell and James Cone have also labeled the spirituals as songs of resistance. In the article by Lovell entitled, “The Social Implication of the Negro Spiritual,” he notes that the spirituals are “living examples of how the African slaves refused to acquiesce to the white man’s beliefs about their inferiority and destiny.”⁵ Further, James Cone in his article, “Interpretations of Black Spirituals,” argues that the spirituals reveal the “social consciousness of Blacks who refused to accept white limitations placed on their lives.”⁶ Lovell and Cone’s analysis of the spirituals becomes apparent if one recalls that in many of the Negro spirituals, there is the recurring theme of the enslaved Africans self-identifying as the children of Israel and especially with biblical characters such as Moses, Joshua, Daniel, and Jonah.

⁵ John Lovell, “The Implications of the Negro Spiritual” in Bernard Katz (ed.), *The Social Implications of Early Negro Music in the United States* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 132.

⁶ James H. Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues* (Maryknoli, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 14.

In self-identifying as the biblical children of Israel, the enslaved Africans are consciously rejecting the definition and destiny imposed upon them by white society. Songs such as “Go Down Moses” and “Didn’t My Lord Deliver Daniel” are two examples. In “Go Down Moses,” the enslaved identify as the children of Israel. In “Didn’t My Lord Deliver Daniel,” the enslaved Negroes are clearly identifying with the biblical character Daniel, when they sing, “O my Lord delivered Daniel. O why not deliver me.”⁷ Moreover, the lyrics suggest resistance to being enslaved and their aspirations of being delivered from bondage just as the biblical character, Daniel, and the children of Israel were delivered from Egyptian slavery.

Like the spirituals, the blues, which emerged after emancipation, was used by Blacks as an instrument of resistance. The protest efforts of blues artists took the form of singing songs that rejected the negative definitions that white society thrust upon African Americans. Blues singers affirmed their dignity by using song to create their own identity and space in the midst of racism, oppression, and injustice.

During the first half of the twentieth century, most blues artists did not openly protest social injustice because they feared white retaliation. One notable exception is Joshua White. In the 1940s, White released a highly controversial album entitled *Joshua White & His Carolinians: Chain Gang*. The album included the song, “Trouble,” which

⁷ Lawrence W. Levine, “Antebellum Period,” in *African American Music: An Introduction*, edited by Mellonee V. Burnim and Portia Maulsby (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), 590.

chronicled the plight of African Americans and included the controversial line, “Well, I have always been in trouble because I am a black skinned man.”⁸ White released another controversial album entitled, *Southern Exposure: An Album of Jim Crow Blues*, which included six anti-segregationist songs.⁹

In the spirit of other genres of music created by African Americans such as the spirituals and blues, African Americans used jazz as an instrument of protest. In 1929, trumpeter Louis Armstrong protested racial discrimination in his song entitled “What Did I Do to Be So Black and Blue.” In the 1940s, bebop artists used their music to critique the racial status quo. Bebop protested against commercialism in the jazz industry, swing music, and white American culture. With respect to bebop, it was the style of both the music and the musicians that signified it as African American protest music. By the 1950’s, Blacks were engaged in the Civil Rights Movement and some jazz artists would rise to the occasion to assist with the Movement. Charles Mingus, a bassist, known for his social activism against racism, would write “Fables of Faubus” in response to Arkansas Governor Orville Faubus’ refusal to allow public schools in Arkansas to desegregate.¹⁰

⁸ Elijah Wald, “Josh White and the Protest Blues,” <http://www.elijahwald.com/joshprotest.html> {accessed 7 May 2009}.

⁹ Joshua White, *Southern Exposure: An Album of Jim Crow Blues*, Keynote Recordings Album 107, 1941.

¹⁰ Raul d’ Gama Rose, “Fables of Faubus,” <http://www.allaboutjazz.com/php/article.php?id=15205> {accessed 17 March 2009}.

Additionally, Civil Rights Movement organizers encouraged musicians to support its efforts. Select artists within the jazz community affirmatively responded to its call by performing benefit concerts, recording albums with political themes, attributing political meaning to jazz and religious ideas, and engaging in highly charged dialogues about race and racism in the jazz industry.¹¹ Some of the best known works by jazz artists exemplifying protest themes during the late 1950s and early 1960s include “Wilbur Harden’s “Gold Coast” (1958), Max Roach’s *We Insist! Freedom Now* (1960), Randy Weston’s *Uhuru Afrika* (1960), Charlie Mingus’s “Original Faubus Fables” (1960), Art Blakely’s *Freedom Rider* (1961), and John Coltrane’s “Africa” (1961).¹²

Similarly, rhythm and blues (R & B) and soul singers created protest music. However, during the early years of the Civil Rights movement, they did not directly address race and issues of social injustice in their music. It was not until the late 1960s that the song lyrics within R & B and soul began to boldly speak out against social injustice. Music scholar Brian Ward speaks to this point by noting that soul and R & B singers such as Curtis Mayfield and Sam Cooke used quasi-religious imagery and soul rather than a direct invocation of race, Jim Crow or the Movement in their music.¹³

A notable exception is Nina Simone. In the early 1960s, Simone wrote “Mississippi Goddam” in response to the killing of Medgar Evers in Mississippi and the

¹¹ Ingrid Monson, “Chronological Overview,” in *African American Music: An Introduction*, edited by Mellonee V. Burnim and Portia Maulsby (New York: Routledge, 2006), 159.

¹² Monson, 159.

¹³ Brian Ward. *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 301.

16th Street Baptist Church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama. The lyrics of the song are bold and capture the frustration that Black Americans were feeling. Simone sang:

Oh, this whole country's full of lies.
 Y'all gonna die and die like flies,
 I' don't trust you anymore,
 When you keep sayin'
 "Go slow, go slow". . .
 Do things gradually and bring more tragedy.

Other well-known songs created for social protest by R & B and soul singers during the Civil Rights and Black Power eras include: "A Change Is Gonna Come" by Sam Cooke (1965), "Respect" by Otis Redding (1965) and also by Aretha Franklin (1967), "Say It Loud – I'm Black and I'm Proud" (1968) and "I Don't Want Nobody to Give Me Nothing (Open Up the Door, I'll Get It Myself)" by James Brown (1970), "Living in the City" by Stevie Wonder (1973), "What's Going On" by Marvin Gaye (1971), "People Get Ready" by Curtis Mayfield (1965) and as formerly mentioned "Mississippi Goddam" (1964) and "To Be Young, Gifted and Black" (1970) both of which are by Nina Simone.

Further discussion of protest music will occur in chapter three. Special attention will be given to Gil Scott-Herron, The Last Poets, and The Watts Prophets from the Black Arts Movement. These artists are often considered to be the progenitors of hip hop music. Additionally, the Black Panther Party recorded revolutionary soul music in order to help politicize the masses. Chapter three will include highlights of Black Panther musicians who used their music to promote the ideals of revolution.

Statement of Problem, Rationale, and Significance

The problem this study seeks to address is that despite scholars and critics positing that the Black Power Movement influenced hip hop music, narratives directly connecting hip hop to the Black Power era are diminutive. Hip hop scholarship has opted to focus its attention on the influence of the Black Arts Movement upon hip hop in terms of the stylistic similarities between the spoken word poetry of poets from the 1960s and 1970s as opposed to focusing on their ideological similarities. Emphasis has been given to utilization of performing poetry over a rhythmic beat and the presence of socially conscious themes found in both spoken word poetry from the 1960s and political hip hop music. Scholars such as James Edward Smethurst, Michael Eric Dyson, and William Jelani Cobb are examples who each present arguments that suggest hip hop's precursor is found in the Black Arts Movement. Smethurst states that political hip hop artists from DJ Afrika Bambaata to Mos Def see the BAM as a "crucial ancestor."¹⁴ In turn, according to Smethurst, Black Arts writers look at the socially engaged, political "underground" and alternative rappers as their linear decedents.¹⁵

Dyson argues that hip hop, "especially in its earlier incantations, when it was directly connected to relatively intimate spaces of recreation, leisure, and cultural

¹⁴ James Edward Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 371.

¹⁵ Smethurst, 371.

creativity was fueled by the same energy and purpose as the BAM's live poetry and readings."¹⁶ Furthermore, when examining songs such as Public Enemy's, "Fight the Power," Dyson argues that political hip hop artists "owe a debt to the BAM."¹⁷

Cobb adds to the discussion by suggesting that during the genesis of hip hop, it is reasonable to assume that its earliest MCs and DJs were exposed to spoken word artists such as the Last Poets, Gil Scott Herron and the Watts Prophets. This thesis seems to be induced by Cobb because of the adjacency in the time line; it is clear that hip hop was just germinating when the Last Poets, Gil Scott Herron, and Watts Prophets were at their apex. Secondly, Cobb notes the stylistic similarities. Cobb comments:

Give "Wake Up, Nigger" from the eponymous debut album a listen and it becomes clear that Last Poets Jalal Nurridin and Umar Bin Hassan are working as proto-rappers, playing many of the verbal techniques that would later become central to the MCs. Their self-titled debut album was released close enough to the beginnings of hip hop to have almost been a contemporary influence.¹⁸

While Smethurst, Dyson, and Cobb present good points and sound arguments that show a link between political hip hop music and the Black Arts Movement, what is missing in each of their comments is hard evidence conclusively linking political hip hop music to the Black Power era in terms of its ideology. This study seeks to add to the body of existing knowledge by providing narratives to detail the direct and indirect influences

¹⁶ Michael Eric Dyson. *Know What I Mean?* (New York, NY: Basic Civitas Books, 2007), 64.

¹⁷ Dyson, 64.

¹⁸ William Jelani Cobb. *To the Break of Dawn: A Free Style on the Hip Hop Aesthetic* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 42-3.

of the Black Power Movement upon hip hop music in terms of the Black Power ideology, specifically how the ideology espoused by the Black Panther Party during its' nationalistic phase impacted the music of Tupac Shakur. Furthermore, by exploring hip hop's connections to the Black Power and Black Arts movements, this study will provide another interpretation of how one looks at hip hop music and how hip hop music fits into African American history as a tool for resistance.

Research Question

The researcher seeks to determine whether the ideology of the Black Panther Party during its nationalistic phase impacted the music of Tupac Shakur. The study thereby poses the following research question:

- To what extent if any does the ideology of the Black Panther Party exist in the political music of Tupac Shakur?

In posing this research question, the study hopes to discover whether the ideology of the Black Panther Party, a revolutionary political organization that considered itself to be the vanguard during the Black Power era, either directly or indirectly influenced political hip hop artists such as Tupac Shakur. The study will examine each point enumerated in the Ten Point Program and selected songs within the musical catalog of Tupac Shakur. Shakur's lyrics will then be queried for evidence of whether his lyrics match any of the ten points listed in the Ten Point Program.

Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework that will be used in this research is the internal colonialism theory. This theory will be used to explain the substantial presence of Black Nationalism within hip hop music, especially the music of Tupac Shakur. Internal or domestic colonialism as a theoretical framework was popularized in the late 1960s by Black militants such as Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael), Charles Hamilton, and Eldridge Cleaver and scholars such as psychologist, Kenneth Clark and social theorist, Harold Cruse. Internal or domestic colonialism maintained that African Americans living in the continental United States had much in common with the colonized people of color in other parts of the world such as Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

What differentiated the African American situation from that of their colonized brethren abroad was that in the African American model, the colonized and colonizer both resided in the United States. However, the key debilitating experience for the colonized in either model was that people of color were being dominated and marginalized by a white power structure. Some adherents of this theory suggested that the colonized would eventually revolt. In Harold Cruse's essay "Revolutionary Nationalism and the Afro American," he notes that because Black Americans were a colonized group of people, nationalist movements would arise.¹⁹ In Robert Hind's article "The Internal Colonial Concept," the author states that, "manifestations of black people's protest such

¹⁹ Harold Cruse "Revolutionary Nationalism and the Afro-American" in *Black Fire*, ed. Leroi Jones and Larry Neal (New York: William Monroe & Company, 1968), 43.

as urban riots, the cultural developments amongst them, and their attempts to control their ghettos have been interpreted as reactions to a colonial status.”²⁰ In addition, Robert Blauner’s widely referenced essay “Internal Colonialism” notes that urban riots, cultural nationalism, and the desire within the Afro-American community for control of its communities were responses to colonialism.²¹

Thus, this study will use internal colonialism (or domestic colonialism as referred to by Cruse and some of the 1960s Black revolutionaries) in its examination of Shakur’s music. The framework is applicable because much of the political oriented hip hop music emanating from Tupac Shakur and other political hip hop artists expressed Black nationalistic themes within their lyrics. Arguably, the rise of political hip hop music during the Golden Era of Hip Hop is illustrative of the “rise of nationalistic movements” that Cruse and others stated would surface as a result of the semi-colonial status of African Americans.

Methodology

In this study, the political hip hop music of Tupac Shakur will be examined in hopes of tracing its ideological roots to the Black Power Movement. This will be accomplished by conducting a qualitative research method known as content analysis.

²⁰ Robert Hind. “The Internal Colonial Concept” in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 26 no 3, July 1984, 547.

²¹ Robert Blauner. “Internal Colonization and Ghetto Revolt” in *Social Problems*, vol 16, no 4, Spring 1969, 363.

Klaus Krippendorff defines content analysis as a research technique used to make replicable and valid inferences from data to their context.²² In content analysis, researchers examine artifacts of social communication.²³ Typically, these artifacts are written documents or transcriptions of verbal communication.²⁴ Broadly defined, content analysis is “any technique” that allows the researcher to make inferences from the messages extracted from the data under examination via a systematic approach.²⁵ Therefore, utilizing content analysis as a research method is an appropriate strategy because the study seeks to examine selected hip hop compositions (or songs) and provide new insights about the meanings of the lyrics within the context of the Black Power Movement. Specifically, this study focuses on the discography of Tupac Shakur. During the Golden Era of Hip Hop, Shakur released four albums: *2Pacalypse Now* (1991), *Strictly 4 My Niggaz* (1993), *Me Against the World* (1995), and *All Eyes on Me* (1996). Additionally, the posthumously singles released after the death of Shakur, but written during the Golden Era of Hip Hop will be examined.

Tupac Shakur’s politically oriented hip hop music is an excellent choice for this research. Throughout Tupac’s rap career, he was listed on Billboard magazine’s Top 10 Rap Songs chart. Not only was he a popular artist but many of his critically acclaimed

²² Klaus Krippendorff, *Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1980), 21.

²³ Bruce L. Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods* (Boston: Pearson Education, Inc., 2004), 267.

²⁴ Berg, 267.

²⁵ Berg, 267.

songs are filled with powerful socially conscious lyrics. He is often remembered for songs such as “Dear Mama,” “Keep Your Head Up,” “Changes,” “Trapped,” “Brenda’s Got a Baby,” “Holla If Ya Hear Me,” “Letter to the President,” “Black Jesus” and so many more. His socially conscious lyrics often spoke about the Black struggle and the needs of poor and underclass Americans. While many rappers identified with the struggle of the Black underclass, Tupac grew up in poverty himself. Moreover, Tupac was also an activist in his own right; one who never hesitated to speak out against racial and social injustice, both before fame and after he became a widely respected rapper and actor. His participation in the Brotherhood Crusade in 1995 where he publicly denounced California’s Proposition 209 is a testimony to that. So too is his willingness to stand up to defend a Black motorist who was being harassed by two off duty police officers in Atlanta, GA in 1993.

Additionally, as a youth, Tupac served as the national chairman of the New Afrikan Panthers in 1989. Being the son of two members of the Black Panther Party, it should come as no surprise that Tupac Amaru Shakur would rise to the occasion and engage in social activism. The *All Music Guide to Hip Hop* sums it up best when they state that Tupac emerged from out of nowhere seemingly as a second-rate rapper to become one of the most definitive rappers of the 1990s²⁶ during the Golden Era of Hip Hop, just in time to infuse the world with his lyrics before closing out the era.

²⁶

Vladimir Bogdanov, Chris Wostra, Steven T. Erlewine, and John Bush, eds., *All Music Guide to Hip Hop* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2003), 486.

Chapter Organization and Summary

The thesis will be organized to include five chapters. The first chapter will be the introductory chapter. This chapter shall include the purpose of the research, the problem statement, the significance of the study, and the research question. Chapter one will also include the conceptual framework. Lastly, a discussion of the methodological approaches utilized will occur.

Chapter two will consist of an analysis of the literature reviewed. A critical analysis of literature from the Black Power Movement, the Black Arts Movement, and hip hop will be included, giving special attention to any literature that illustrates their intersection.

Chapter three will comprise the historical chapter. It will include a brief history of the Black Power Movement, the Black Arts Movement, and the Black Panther Party. Also, chapter three will include a brief history of hip hop in terms of its genesis in the South Bronx area of New York in the early 1970s. Specifically, this chapter will focus on what caused hip hop music and culture to germinate into a Black nationalistic ethos during the late 1980s through the mid-1990s.

In chapter four, hip hop compositions by Tupac Shakur will be examined. The findings from the content analysis will then be presented. Chapter five will include recommendations for future study. In the final analysis, the researcher anticipates that evidence will be found to support the notion that the Black Power movement influenced political hip hop music, specifically the politically oriented hip hop music of Tupac

Shakur. If evidence unfolds to support this notion, the study hopes to determine what were the specific ideological perspectives from the Black Power movement that are found within the lyrics of Tupac Shakur's music.

Definitions of Terms

Black: Black has the first letter capitalized because it represents a proper noun describing African-American people and others of African descent in the Diaspora of African people. Nikki Giovanni, a noted poet from the Black Arts Movement declared in "Black is the Noun" that she is an "American Black...."²⁷ It was prevalent during the Black Arts and Black Power era for the B in Black to be capitalized and for this research effort, which focuses on the Black Power epoch, the noun is Black; American is the adjective." Moreover, the racial categories listed in the United States census offer a choice of Black or African American to represent people of African descent.

Black Aesthetic: The black aesthetic is the hallmark of the Black Arts Movement. In general terms, it connotes a set of principles used for the judgment of Black art.

Black Nationalism: Black Nationalism is a social and political movement that advocates a Black national identity and self-government for African descended people.

The major tenets of a Black nationalist ideology are Black pride and economic, political, social and/or cultural autonomy for Black people.

²⁷ Nikki Giovanni, *The Prosaic Soul of Nikki Giovanni* (New York: Perennial, 2003), 424.

Cultural Nationalism: Cultural nationalism is a form of Black nationalism in which the nation is defined by a common culture.

Disc Jockey: A disc jockey plays records at a dance club, party, or on a radio station. In hip hop, the disk jockey or DJ is the individual who provides the music for the hip hop artist, rapper, or the break dancer. In the genesis of the hip hop movement, the DJ was the cornerstone.

Gangsta Rap: Gangsta rap is a media-driven term to describe rap lyrics that portray street life and violence.²⁸

Hip Hop Music: The researcher will be using the term hip hop music instead of rap to distinguish hip hop music, a cultural music, from the highly commercialized version of rap music.

MC: An MC is a solo rapper or group (crew or posse) of rappers who recite poetry over DJ accompaniment.²⁹

Nation Conscious Rap (Hip Hop) Music: This term represents politically conscious hip hop music that contains pro-Black nationalistic message or themes within its lyrics.

Protest Song: A protest song is a song that is associated with a movement for social change.³⁰

²⁸ Yvonne Bynoe, *Encyclopedia of Rap and Hip Hop Culture* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2006), 149.

²⁹ Mellonee V. Burnim and Portia Maulsby, eds. *African American Music: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), 646.

³⁰ Elizabeth J. Kizer, "Protest Song Lyrics as Rhetoric," *Popular Music and Society* 9, no 1 (1983): 3-4.

Rap: Rap is a musical style usually featuring an MC, who recites rhymed verses over an accompaniment created by a DJ.

Rhythm and Blues (R & B): Rhythm and Blues is a combination form of Black dance music that emerged during the World War II era as a fusion of blues and swing jazz elements.³¹

Soul Music: Soul music is a gospel-influenced African American popular music style that began to emerge in the late 1950s and became popular in the 1960s.³²

Underground Hip Hop Music: In Yvonne Bynoe's *Encyclopedia of Rap and Hip Hop Culture*: "underground" is the term used to define hip hop music that is not associated with a major record company. Bynoe defines underground music as music that is not associated with a major record company or music which reflects a more diverse and often socially aware element within hip hop music and culture developing around the United States but not usually promoted by commercial entertainment outlets, including radio and music video programs.

³¹ Burnim, 647.

³² Burnim, 648.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review focuses on how ideologies from the Black Power and Black Arts Movements influenced hip hop music. Numerous scholars have noted the parallelism between the Black Power and Black Arts Movements of the late 1960s and hip hop, which itself is a movement. What has been left as virgin territory, largely unexplored, or at best a road less academically traveled is the narrative directly connecting the Black Power era to the socio-political lyrics found in much of hip hop music from its very inception to its golden era. The thesis presented in this research seeks to address this void in hip hop scholarship. Subsequently, this review of literature will present a chronological trace of the body of literature that discusses the parallelisms that exist between hip hop and the Black Power era as well as the limited direct connections scholars have drawn between the Black Power and Black Arts Movements and hip hop music.

In 1984, David Toop gave the world, *Rap Attack*, one of the first written accounts of hip hop's formation and global evolution. Toop links hip hop music's most immediate predecessors to spoken word musicians/poets of the early 1970s such as the Last Poets and Gil Scott-Heron. He discusses how the spoken word poetry of the Last Poets was rooted in the historical moment of the flourishing Black Arts Movement which was

dominated by writers such as Amiri Baraka and musicians such as Archie Shepp and Sun Ra to name a few. Specifically, Toop notes how tracks found on the Last Poet's *Hustler's Convention*, as well as other albums by the Last Poets, Watts Prophets, and Gil Scott Heron found their way into the hands of DJs from the South Bronx area of New York in the early 1970s. His work chronicles how these trailblazing DJs laid the foundation for the hip hop movement.

Following Toop's work are a plethora of writers who wanted to be on the cusp of music nouveau. These authors wrote books about hip hop trivia and culture without connecting the art form and those who had been designated as its creators, to any prior historical movement. By the early 1990s and upon the aftermath of the Rodney King beating in Los Angeles, hip hop literature began to engage in serious discussions about the relevance and complexity of the music. Scholars and cultural critics emerged to link hip hop with the Black Arts Movement's spoken word poetry and music. Furthermore, Black Arts theoreticians, writers, and cultural critics such as Amiri Baraka re-emerged to suggest that hip hop music, particularly politically oriented hip hop music, bears a striking resemblance to the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

In Baraka's unpublished essay written in 1994, "The Black Arts Movement," he suggests that both a parallelism and a realization of the goals artists from the Black Arts Movement sought to achieve exists. Baraka explained that during the Black Arts Movement they wanted Black art that was identifiably Afro American, a mass art and a revolutionary art. The essay illustrates Baraka's initial excitement about hip hop music as

poetry and politics. He saw it as the coveted mass art that his era failed to achieve.

Baraka stated:

That's why Rap delighted me so and still does (even though it has been widely co-opted by Uncle Bubba and the Mind Bandits) because I could see that some of what came out of us had taken root. An open popular mass based poetry. It arrived that's why the corporations moved so swiftly to cover up and co-opt. Why they disappeared Grand Master Flash and Africa Bambaataa, accused Professor Griff of the big A-S and brought in flesh rap like Too Live Crew; middle class Negro rap such as Jazzy Jeff and Fresh Prince and finally straight out Americans like Vanilla Ice and "Young Teen agers" (white). Gangsta rap was also brought in to exchange political agitation with ignorant braggadocio and thuggish imbecility, justifying the state nigger youth annihilation program.¹

Another essay that emerged in hip hop scholarship that connects the BAM to the Hip Hop Movement is the essay by Marvin Gladney entitled "The Black Arts Movement and Hip Hop." Instead of focusing on connections between hip hop and its artistic forebears, Gladney concentrates on ideological connections between hip hop and the Black Arts Movement. Hip hop music is linked to the BAM in Gladney's opinion because of the presence of three fundamental elements for which the Black Arts Movement is renowned. Gladney identifies those elements as Black anger or rage, the establishment of independent Black institutions or business outlets, and adherence to the Black aesthetic. With respect to the element of anger or rage, Gladney identifies Black anger as being present in both movements. One such example in Black Arts literature that affirms Gladney's thesis is Addison Gayle's *The Black Aesthetic*. In the anthology Gayle

¹ Amiri Baraka, "The Black Arts Movement" (Atlanta, 1994), 8.

speaks of the attacks made by white literary critics who analyzed the literature from the Black Arts Movement. Those critics condemned the work of BAM artists and made a point to separate it from other African American literature that preceded it by categorizing Black Arts literature as nothing more than mere anger and Black protest ethics. Gayle argues that anger has always been a part of Black literature and notes the source of Black American anger was framed when the first African was forcibly removed from his native homeland and brought to the New World to build a prosperous America to benefit his captors. Because of this historical legacy, Gayle argues that any African American writer who does not express some element of anger in his work is writing solely as an American as opposed to that of an African American.²

Although Gayle's hypothesis concerning Black rage emerges in the early 1970s, they mirror Gladney's analysis on anger within hip hop music in the mid 1990s. Hip hop artists are continuing in the tradition that the artists of the BAM became renowned when they angrily speak against socio-political and economic injustices that have plagued their communities. Moreover, gangsta rap is especially noted for this element of anger in its vivid depiction of the effects of unemployment, racism, drug trafficking, police brutality, and violence when it speaks out against the criminalization of African American and Latino youth living in urban communities. A myriad of scholars such as Michael Eric Dyson, Robin Kelley, Bakari Kitwana, and William Eric Perkins have discussed the element of Black rage and anger within gangsta lyrics and within hip hop music at large.

² Addison Gayle, *The Black Aesthetic* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1972), xv.

They however do not speak about hip hop music within the context of its ideological connections to the Black Power era. Gladney's essay provides ample evidence of how hip hop music voices social issues of its time and thus is picking up the torch blazed during the Black arts era.

Gladney also notes that artists from both the Black Arts and hip hop movements found it a necessity to have their own institutions for either publishing or distributing their cultural products. This is because commercial considerations have always been an issue for African American artists who speak against the status quo. Artists during the BAM dealt with the problem of distribution of their cultural product when their social messages ran into contention with the status quo by establishing their own institutions such as publishing houses and theater companies. Likewise, hip hop artists and scholars soon realized that recording companies favored pop acts that contain lyrics filled with humor and mockery rather than those that address social ills. Gladney's essay notes that many hip hop artists who rap about politically and socially oriented issues found it necessary to create their own venue for distribution of their music just as the respective artistic predecessors from the BAM. He notes that for political hip hop artists, this has often meant that they have to create their own record labels or work with independent record companies.

Lastly, Gladney discusses the black aesthetic and how the baton has now been passed down from the Black Arts Movement to the Hip Hop Movement. During the Black Arts Movement, Addison Gayle theorized that the black aesthetic "is a corrective"

or “a means of helping Black people out of the polluted mainstream of Americanism...”³

Inclusive of Gayle’s essay, there is a body of literature emerging from the BAM that discusses the Black aesthetic. One of the foremost, cultural critics from the BAM is Maulana Karenga. Karenga, a chief Black aesthetic architect, argues that the Black aesthetic is a set of principles for the judgment of Black art. In “Black Cultural Nationalism,” Karenga called for Black art to adhere to three principles; it must be “functional, collective, and committing.” By functional, Karenga meant that Black art should serve a purpose and that purpose is to promote revolution. For Black art to be collective, it must be from the people and returned by the people in a form more beautiful or colorful than it originally was in real life.⁴ Secondly, it must promote unity instead of individuality and [thus] the best subject for Black art is Black people themselves; any other subject is viewed as unproductive.⁵ The third principle that Black art should adhere to is that it must be committing. For Black art to be committing, it must commit Black people to change or revolution. According to Karenga, “Any art that does not discuss and contribute to revolution is invalid, no matter how many lines and spaces are produced in proportion or symmetry and no matter how many sounds are boxed in blown out and called music.”⁶

³ Gayle, xxii.

⁴ Ron Karenga, “Black Cultural Nationalism,” in *The Black Aesthetic*, ed. Addison Gayle Jr. (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1972), 33.

⁵ Karenga, 33.

⁶ Karenga, 31.

Gladney posits that hip hop music has a Black aesthetic, and it uses the criteria advanced by Black aestheticians, such as Karenga and Gayle, from the Black Arts Movement in the judgment of hip hop music. His essay notes that hip hop artists, its listeners, and the Black intelligentsia have enforced a Black aesthetic that serves as a corrective—seeking to make life more beautiful than originally. Gladney distinguishes between “the real hip-hop” music, which he deems as cultural music and the commercialized rap music broadcast on urban radio. Commercial rap music, according to Gladney, lacks hip hop’s political, racial, and social consciousness. Gladney’s cleverly emphasizes this thesis by intertwining lyrics from the hip hop song “Patti Dooke” by De La Soul and a rhyme by KRS-One. In his essay, he notes that in the hip hop song “Patti Duke,” De La Soul cautions Black America about the attempts made to change the style of its music and warns Blacks that the creators of authentic hip hop music need to take control of the art form. Gladney illustrates how hip hop artist KRS-One makes a similar distinction between the cultural music of hip hop versus commercialized music as illustrated below:

Understand that rap is rebellious music
 Therefore only the rebels should use it
 The pop artist abuse it
 When the audience hears real rap
 they boo it.
 See rap music is a culture and
 Everyone outside of it is a vulture
 The vulture makes money off the culture.⁷

⁷ Marvin J. Gladney. “The Black Arts Movement and Hip-Hop,” *African American Review* 29, no 2, (Summer, 1995): 295.

Likewise, Black Arts Movement poet and writer Sonia Sanchez in “The Be Bop, the Bam, and the Hip-Hop” provides her perspective with regard to the poetry of the Black Arts Movement and its connection to hip hop music, which she also defines as poetry. Sanchez’s comments infer that hip hop artists undoubtedly were exposed to the poetry of the Black Arts Movement and simply built upon the base in which they were provided. According to Sanchez, it is almost as if the aesthetic traditions were transferred without a formal baton pass. Sanchez, who was born in 1934, presented this argument in her essay by first establishing the fact that she listened to the language of her grandmother, the poets that came before her, and the jazz musicians of her father’s generation. She notes that she heard the older poets of her era read their poetry and was impressed. However, when the older poets heard Sanchez and her peers perform, they noticed that Sanchez and her cronies jazzed up the readings by adding improvisational moans, groans, stretches, and accents. The poets who preceded them did not read like that. Sanchez argues that the earliest hip hop artists are in fact poets who heard the language, the sound, and embraced what they heard, just as she did. Sanchez states, “And they did the same thing that we did with poetry and sound, they did the pace, the pace of sound, the color of sound, the beat of sound, but above all it was the fast beat.”⁸ It is clear that Sanchez believes that the similarity between the spoken word poetry of BAM artists and those of hip hop music exist because hip hop artists heard or were exposed to

⁸ Sonia Sanchez. “The Bebop, the Bam, and the Hip-Hop,” *Souls*, vol. 5, no. 1, (Winter 2003): 68.

either the poetry or music of the BAM. Hip hop artists just re-contextualized the manner in which the poems were performed.

Interestingly, hip hop lyricist Chuck D of the rap group Public Enemy discusses the parallelism between Black Arts Movement artists the Last Poets and Gil Scott-Heron and other hip hop artists. Chuck D's comments mirror Sanchez's in that they both suggest that a re-contextualization occurred upon exposure to the work of artists from their past. Hip hop artists, according to Chuck D, were exposed to the Last Poets and Gil Scott-Heron to the degree that they perhaps borrowed the concept of speaking poetically over a beat. Chuck D stated:

The thing about the Last Poets and Gil Scott-Heron is they were into a jazz type approach, doing poetry over a beat. When rap came along, it was poetry over a beat too, but in time. More important than the Last Poets and Gil Scott-Heron, to us, was James Brown. His record "Say It Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud" had the most impact because it was danceable and yet you still thought about it.⁹

This distinction between the music of the Last Poets and James Brown in comments made by Chuck D suggests that there were aesthetic differences between the jazz influenced musical sounds of the Last Poets and the highly rhythmic soul music of James Brown which appealed to the then youthful Chuck D and his friends. Scholars substantiate Chuck D's analysis. In Brian Ward's *Just My Soul Responding*, Ward argues that cultural nationalists failed to understand that jazz did not resonate with the African

⁹ Jeffrey Louis Decker, "The State of Rap: Time and Place in Hip Hop Nationalism," *Social Texts* (Spring 1993): 63.

American masses to the degree of soul music. He also notes that politically oriented music must entertain as it politicizes. For African Americans, social and political messages in music – not to mention joy and emotional solace – were most frequently borne by the sturdy, compelling rhythms of dance music, or atop the crest of an irresistible vocal wave.¹⁰

In short, Ward's work seems to suggest that music must be culturally significant to capture the attention of the African American masses. Hence, the funky rhythms found in "Say It Loud, I'm Black and Proud," coupled with the political message of Black pride found in the lyrics possessed the cultural ingredients that both entertained and politicized. The Last Poets and Gil Scott Heron may have helped lay the foundation for the burgeoning hip hop movement, but it was the danceable music found in James Brown's songs that were more culturally appealing to Chuck D and many Black Americans. Hip hop artists from the golden era appear to have borrowed from the Last Poets by performing political poetry over a beat. However, instead of utilizing jazz, they required that the tempo be highly rhythmic and danceable. Just as Sanchez and her comrades "jazzed up" the poetry to fit her generation, hip hop did the same. Hip hop modified what it bequeathed from the poets and musicians of the Black Arts era for contemporary times.

In Jeffrey Louis Decker's "The State of Rap: Time and Place in Hip Hop Nationalism," Decker discusses the concern with time mentioned by both Chuck D and Sanchez, but in this case it is with respect to an epoch in time as opposed to musical time. Decker argues that within political hip hop music, which he refers to as nation conscious

¹⁰ Decker, 63.

hip hop music, there are two tendencies. Decker suggested that there is a tendency for hip hop lyrics to be either time inspired or place inspired. Time inspired hip hop music focuses on the concept of nation time. The time frame is the 1960s and 1970s Black Power era, a period in which there was a resurgence of Black nationalism. Decker states that the political rhetoric of important organizations from this era such as the Black Panther Party and Nation of Islam are frequently sampled and imaged within hip hop music. Furthermore, time-inspired hip hop music raises the cultural icons from the 1960s and 1970s Black Power era to address contemporary social concerns.

Decker also designates what he refers as place-inspired hip hop music. In place inspired hip hop music, Egypt is identified as the center of African origin. Egypt is described as a cultural epic-center for African people. For this reason, Decker coins place-inspired hip hop music as Afrocentric hip hop nationalism. Place-inspired hip hop music mirrors the cultural nationalism for which the BAM became renowned. It celebrates, and in some instances hallows, African culture.

Not all scholars are of the opinion that political hip hop music fits neatly into the two categories described by Decker. In *Brothers Gonna Work It Out*, Charise L. Cheney discusses political hip hop music from the Golden Era. Like Decker, Cheney categorizes political hip hop music as Black nationalistic and refers to it as “nation conscious” hip hop music. Unlike Decker, Cheney suggests that political hip hop music is profoundly inspired by the 1960s and it emerges directly out of the Black Power era, regardless of whether it is time inspired or place inspired. Cheney posits that the hip hop artists themselves, who she refers to as “raptivists” because they are both rappers and activists,

were heavily influenced by revolutionary activists from the 1960s, such as Malcolm X and the Black Panther Party. However, in practice, she argues that political hip hop artists and nation conscious hip hop artists are more reminiscent of the cultural nationalists from the Black Arts Movement, particularly the musicians, poets, writers, and scholars of the Black aesthetic.¹¹

Like Decker and Cheney, William Eric Perkins in his essay entitled “Rap Attack” argues that political hip hop music from the Golden Era falls into categories. Perkins argues that political hip hop or “message rap” can be subdivided into three categories: Islamic, neo-nationalist, and African centered.¹² Islamic hip hop addresses social and political concerns via the ideology of the Nation of Islam (NOI) or the Five Percenters, an off-shoot of the NOI. Neo-nationalist hip hop as discussed by Perkins falls into the category that Decker and Cheney both referred to as 1960s-inspired hip hop. Perkins regards Public Enemy as premiere neo-nationalist hip hop artists, referring to the group as ushering in a Malcolm X revival through its music. African centered hip hop mirrors Decker’s description of Afro-centric hip hop which places Egypt at its center. Perkins regards the hip hop group, X-Clan as the epitome of the African centered genre of political hip hop music. Perkins argues that the group is reminiscent of the cultural nationalism of the 1960s and describes them as presenting pop flavored Egyptology

¹¹ Charise Cheney, *Brothers Gonna Work It Out* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 85.

¹² William Perkins, “Rap Attack,” in *Droppin’ Science: Critical Essays on Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 20.

[while] ... arrayed in African garb.¹³ Thus, in comparing Perkins comments with those of Decker and Cheney, it is clear that each scholar advocates that within political hip hop music, whether its neo-nationalist or African centered, the 1960s Black Power era in some manner fuels the genre.

Historian Robin Kelley speaks to the notion of hip hop music's roots in the Black Power era in the essay "Kickin' Reality, Kickin Ballistics." Kelley explores the cultural politics of gangsta rap and links it to Black Power. Gangsta rap has been the recipient of scathing remarks from both the media and middle-class African Americans, especially Black women and specifically Black feminists for its alleged promotion of violence, "gangsterism" or the gang life style, and misogynistic lyrics. Kelley, however, looks at gangsta rap as a form of African American male working-class resistance against oppression, discrimination, and police brutality. He argues that many of the lyrics that have been castigated as expressions of violence are not meant to be taken literally.

What is relevant to this study about Kelley's essay is the case in which gangsta rap lyrics give audiences a vivid window into the lifestyles of urban dwellers especially those living within the environs of Los Angeles area ghettos. Kelley argues that the purpose of the gangsta rapper is often to critique the social, political, and economic issues that produce the characters and situations that the lyrics are narrating. It is not to promote violence or gangsta ethics. Kelley argues that gangsta rappers narrate in first person and simply "step into the character of gang banger, hustler, or ordinary working person" in

¹³ Perkins, 25.

order to present an alternative voice to mainstream journalists and social scientists.¹⁴ The gang banger, hustler, ordinary working person that gangsta rap focuses on are “products and residents of the hood.”¹⁵ Further, gangsta rap’s focus on the urban dweller, or the working class, is parallel, if not a mirror image, to the Black Panthers focus on the lumpen proletariat or underclass.

The Panthers believed that lumpen proletariats were the most likely individuals to invoke revolution because they do not have as large of an investment in main stream society. Interestingly enough, Kelley notes the influence of the 1960s and 1970s within gangsta rap as have Decker and Cheney. Kelley starts by linking gangsta rap to the pimp narratives that became popular in the late 60s and 70s but builds upon this idea when he points out how gangsta rappers such as Ice Cube have lyrically argued for gang bangers to become politicized. Instead of participating in Black on Black crime, he argues that instead they should become revolutionary guerillas. While the focus of Kelley’s essay was not the Black Panther Party, one cannot help but to recall that the Black Panther Party advanced this ideology. For example, Black Panther Party member Eldridge Cleaver who served as the Minister of Information and head of the international section of the party published political tracts that pushed the Panther ideology of self-defense “all the way to the edge [by] advocating guerilla warfare.”¹⁶ In Peniel E. Joseph’s *Waiting til*

¹⁴ Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class*. (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 190.

¹⁵ Kelley, 190.

¹⁶ Peniel E. Joseph. *Waiting ‘Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of the Black Power Movement in America*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006), 214.

the Midnight Hour, a narrative on the history of the Black Power movement in America, it is noted that for Cleaver, the Panthers were not just simply the vanguard of the Black Power Movement, they were the vanguard party of an “imminent revolution that would be waged by an army of politically conscious former prisoners, reformed street hoodlums, and disgruntled combat veterans.”

In other words, the gang bangers, pimps, and the underclass that gangsta rappers speak of, once reformed, would become ripe candidates for the revolution that Cleaver felt was imminent. Further, Kelley notes how the hip hop generation was influenced by the 60s and 70s and the parallelism between the gang background of gangsta rappers with that of the Black Panther Party. He informs readers that just as some gangsta rappers may have had gang connections prior to their careers as rappers and hip hop artists, this was the case as well with some members of the Black Panther Party. Kelly states:

We need to keep in mind that the hip hop generation consumed movies like the *Spook Who Sat by the Door*, a film version of Sam Greenlee’s novel about a former Black CIA agent who uses his training to turn gang members into a revolutionary army. The *Autobiography of Malcolm X* convinced unknown numbers of kids that even second rate gangsters can become political radicals. It is possible that a few Angelenos absorbed some OG oral history about the gang roots of the Black Panther Party. LA Panther leaders Bunchy Carter and John Huggins were former members of the Slauson gang, and their fellow gangbanger, Brother Crook (aka Ron Wilkens) founded the Community Alert Patrol to challenge police brutality in the 1960s.¹⁷

¹⁷

Kelley, 196-197.

One hip hop artist with an important link to the Black Panther Party's legacy is the late Tupac Amaru Shakur. In *Tupac Shakur Legacy*, Jamal Joseph discusses the life of Tupac Shakur and his family's Black Panther background. One of the points that Joseph makes is that despite the label that Tupac Shakur was given by the media as a gangsta rapper, Tupac never considered himself to be a gangsta rapper or one who promoted a gangsta lifestyle. In fact, Tupac vehemently refuted the designation and argued that he was a fighter not a gangster.¹⁸ The book includes a compact disc containing interviews with Shakur. One such interview occurred in 1989 in which Bakari Kitwana questions Tupac about his role as the National Chairman of the New African Panthers and the role of hip hop in the revolution. In this interview, Tupac stated that his mission was to speak on the behalf of oppressed Black people, especially the Black male, via his music.¹⁹ Within his music, Tupac made a point to simultaneously speak what the oppressed were thinking as well as what the powers to be feared: guns, power, politics, and pleasure.²⁰

Prior to Tupac's prison sentence in 1995, Tupac crafted a philosophy which he referred to as "Thug Life." At first glance, Thug Life seems to just merely glorify the world of the hustler, gangster or street soldier. Joseph notes that in reality, Thug Life was a code of ethics practiced by those deemed as "thugs" or "gangsters" who sought to protect innocent individuals living in the African American community against violence

¹⁸ Jamal Joseph. *Tupac Shakur Legacy*. (New York: Atria Books, 2006), 29, 41.

¹⁹ *Tupac Shakur Speaks*, Atria Books, CD, 2006.

²⁰ Joseph, 35.

and to prevent the youth from participating in drug trafficking. *Tupac Shakur Legacy* notes that Tupac spoke with his Panther guardians (stepfather, Mutulu Shakur, and godfather, Geronimo Pratt) for advisement on how to implement the “Thug Life” philosophy. The text uncovers how Shakur was successful in implementing the philosophy with the Bloods and the Crips.²¹ In Brooklyn, New York, a summit of local gangsters and hustlers agreed to adhere to the code of honor advanced by Thug Life.²² The Thug Life code of honor is as follows:

CODE OF THUG LIFE

1. All new Jacks to the game must know: a) He’s going to get rich
b) He’s going to jail. c) He’s going to die.
2. Crew Leaders: You are responsible for legal/financial payment commitments to crew members; your word must be your bond.
3. One crew’s rat is every crew’s rat. Rats are now like a disease; sooner or later we all get it; and they should too.
4. Crew leader and posse should select a diplomat, and should work ways to settle disputes. In unity, there is strength!
5. Carjacking in our hood is against the code.
6. Slings to children is against the code.
7. Having children slinging is against the code.
8. No slinging in schools.
9. Since the rat Nicky Barnes opened his mouth, ratting has become accepted by some. We’re not having it
10. Snitches is outta here.
11. The boys in blue don’t run nothing; we do. Control the hood and make it safe for squares.
12. No slinging to pregnant sisters. That’s baby killing; that’s genocide.
13. Know your target, who’s the real enemy.
14. Civilians are not a target and should be spared.
15. Harm to children will not be forgiven.
16. Attacking someone’s home where their family is known to reside,

²¹ Joseph, 38.

²² Joseph, 38.

- must be altered or checked.
17. Senseless brutality and rape must stop.
 18. Our old folks must not be abused.
 19. Respect our Sisters. Respect Our Brothers.
 20. Sisters in the Life must be respected if they respect themselves.
 21. Military disputes concerning business area within the community must be handled professionally and not on the block.
 22. No shooting at parties.
 23. Concerts and parties are neutral; no shooting!
 24. Know the code; it's for everyone.
 25. Be a real ruff neck. Be down with the Code of the Thug Life.
 26. Protect yourself at all times.²³

Tupac's attempt to implement Thug Life as a plan of action among gang members and those engaged in street life culture raises the question of whether Tupac Shakur was in fact organizing a criminal element for revolution as the Panthers did in the 1960s. In John Potash's *The FBI War on Tupac Shakur and Black Leaders*, Potash advances this perspective. Potash presents a sound argument suggesting that American intelligence forces monitored Tupac Shakur and his family for all of Shakur's life and allegedly murdered the rapper because as he became successful, he opted to use his money to support his family's revolutionary political activities in the same vein that artists from the Black Power era did. In examining the Thug Life Code, it seems that the code was explicitly designed to politicize gangs. Potash asserts that "former Black Panthers and others helped the largest Bloods and Crips gang chapters call a peace truce by April 1992. At that truce meeting, a few days before the [Los Angeles] riots, the [gang members]

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Joseph, 38.

agreed to fight racism instead of each other.”²⁴ Secondly, Potash describes the role the Shakur men, Tupac and Mutulu, played in achieving the socialist political objectives of Thug Life. Potash states:

First, imprisoned Mutulu helped broker the Bloods/Crips peace truce in the federal prison system. Then he developed a new hidden political plan with Tupac. They devised their “Thug Life Movement” as a plan with several goals. It included having Tupac take on a “gangsta” persona for the purpose of appealing to gang members and then politicizing them. Thug Life also tried to get gang members to abide by codes of conduct that decreased Black victimization. It further tried to persuade gang members to make legal money through making music. A final goal involved politicizing other rappers. And, while some of Tupac’s lyrics sounded as if they advocated violence for its own sake, they actually called for armed rebellion to oppose racist and economic oppression of “the masses, the lower classes” by the upper class.²⁵

Further, in examining the Thug Life code of honor, the code itself seems quite reminiscent of the Panther’s rules of conduct regarding its members. For example, the first three rules of the Black Panther Party’s rules of conduct forbade narcotics usage and drunkenness. Thug Life forbade the selling of drugs to children and pregnant women. Rule ten and eleven for Black Panther Party members made it a requirement for Panthers to know and understand the Ten Point Program and platform of the party. Similarly, Thug Life required gang members to understand the business and to possess the ability to discern who the real enemy is. Rule eight of the Black Panther rules of conduct, forbade

²⁴ John Potash. *The FBI War on Tupac Shakur and Black Leaders*. (Baltimore: Progressive Left Press, 2007), 62.

²⁵ Potash, 62.

crimes being committed against party members and Black people in general. Thug Life forbade carjacking in their neighborhoods, attacking homes in which family members reside, shooting at parties and concerts. Further, both Thug Life and the Panther rules condemned rape and senseless violence. Lastly, legal and fiscal accountability was mandatory. The BPP required members to submit a daily report of their work and each chapter had to submit a monthly report to the Ministry of Finance and the Central Committee. Likewise, Thug Life mandated crew members to be responsible for legal and financial payment and commitments to other crew members. And ironically, they each consisted of twenty-six rules. The BPP rules of conduct are as follows:

1. No party member can have narcotics or weed in his possession while doing party work.
2. Any party member found shooting narcotics will be expelled from this party.
3. No party member can be DRUNK while doing party work.
4. No party member will violate the rules regarding office work, general meetings of the BLACK PANTHER PARTY ANYWHERE.
5. No party member will USE, POINT or FIRE a weapon of any kind unnecessarily or accidentally at anyone.
6. No party member can join any other army force other than the BLACK LIBERATION ARMY.
7. No party member can have a weapon in his possession while DRUNK or loaded off narcotics or weed.
8. No party member will commit any crimes against other party members or BLACK people at all, and cannot steal or take from the people, not even a needle or piece of thread.
9. When arrested BLACK PANTHER MEMBERS will give only name, address, and will sign nothing. Legal first aid must be understood by all Party members.
10. The Ten-Point Program and platform of the BLACK PANTHER PARTY must be known and understood by each Party member.
11. Party communication must be National and Local.
12. The 10-10-10-program should be known by all members and also understood by all members.

13. All Finance officers will operate under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Finance.
14. Each person will submit a report of daily work.
15. Each Sub-Section Leaders, Section Leaders, and Lieutenants, Captains must submit Daily reports of work.
16. All Panthers must learn to operate and service weapons correctly.
17. All Leadership personnel who expel a member must submit this information to the Editor of the Newspaper, so that it will be published in the paper and will be known by all chapters and branches.
18. Political Education Classes are mandatory for general membership.
19. Only office personnel assigned to respective offices each day should be there. All others are to sell papers and do Political work out in the community, including Captains, Section Leaders, etc.
20. COMMUNICATIONS – all chapters must submit weekly reports in writing to the National Headquarters.
21. All Branches must implement First Aid and/or Medical Cadres.
22. All Chapters, Branches, and components of the BLACK PANTHER PARTY must submit a monthly Financial Report to the Ministry of Finance, and also the Central Committee.
23. Everyone in a leadership position must read no less than two hours per day to keep abreast of the changing political situation.
24. No chapter or branch shall accept grants, poverty funds, money, or any other aid from any government agency without contacting the National Headquarters.
25. All chapters must adhere to the policy and the ideology laid down by the CENTRAL COMMITTEE of the BLACK PANTHER PARTY.
26. All Branches must submit weekly reports in writing to their respective Chapters.²⁶

Joseph's work uncovers that despite Tupac's altruistic ambitions in implementing Thug Life, shortly after his imprisonment for sexual abuse, a crime that Shakur consistently denied, he declared Thug Life dead. He instead chose to focus on using the arts to move Black youth in a positive direction. To move his new plan into action, Tupac made "plans to open community youth centers in every ghetto in America. The centers

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Phillip S. Foner, ed. *The Black Panthers Speak* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), 5-6.

would have acting studios, recording studios, dance and martial arts areas and video areas so the kids could learn and create in a supportive environment.”²⁷ This was not Tupac’s first attempt to lead the youth in a positive direction through the arts and education. In a 1991 interview with Davie D, Tupac announced that he had a production company called the Underground Railroad. Tupac explained that the concept behind the Underground Railroad was:

To get my brothers who might be into drug dealing or whatever it is that is illegal or who are disenfranchised by today’s society” [into music]. It could be R&B, hip hop, or pop, as long as I get them involved. While I’m doing, I’m teaching them to find a love for themselves so they can love others and do the same thing we did for them to others.²⁸

In retrospect, Tupac Shakur’s actions seem to be consistent with both his Panther background in organizing the disenfranchised lumpen proletariats and the cultural nationalism of the Black Arts Movement. His usage of the arts as a means of protest clearly falls in line with Cheney’s assessment of both raptivists who record nation conscious hip hop music as being reminiscent of the cultural nationalism from the Black Arts movement. Further, Joseph narrated facts about the life of Tupac that certainly illustrate the parallelism between the Black Arts Movement and the Hip Hop Movement within the life of Tupac Shakur. For example, Joseph notes the influence of Gil Scott-

²⁷ Joseph, 43.

²⁸ *Tupac Shakur Speaks*, Atria Books, CD-ROM, accompanying *Tupac Shakur Legacy* (Amaru Entertainment, 2006).

Heron on Tupac Shakur and the fact that as a youth Tupac attended a live Gil Scott Heron performance which had a profound impact on him.²⁹ Joseph narrates that throughout Shakur's childhood, he was involved in creative arts workshops where he was exposed to the poetry of Amiri Baraka, Ed Bullins, Nikki Giovanni, and Sonia Sanchez among varied diverse artists.³⁰ Simultaneously, Tupac also would be a staple at Panther events where as early as age seven he would recite revolutionary poetry at Panther rallies and became a voice representing the children of the movement.³¹ This would account for the impact the Black Panther Party had on him from both family background as well as Tupac's personal participation as a child of the movement, all of which, some may argue could be found in both his music and his activism.

Yet, not all of the literature views Tupac Shakur in this light. In the absence of the information presented by Potash regarding the true intent of Shakur's thug image as a tool to politicize the Black underclass, Shakur is thought by some to exemplify the anti-thesis of a Black revolutionary. In Michael Eric Dyson's *Holler If You Hear Me: Searching for Tupac Shakur*, Dyson presents Tupac Shakur as conflicted between his Panther past and his career which seemed to glorify the thug lifestyle that was viewed to be a polar opposite to middle class values. Further, Dyson notes how Black nationalism of the 1970s differed from Black nationalism of the 1980s era in which Tupac was a youth. Tupac was described as conflicted as were other children of the revolutionaries

²⁹ Joseph, 10.

³⁰ Joseph, 12.

³¹ Joseph, 12.

from the 1970s because they tended to measure their effectiveness in terms of standards from the past. According to Dyson, in the 1980s, Black nationalism turned inward, as it sought to protect its interests rather than destroy the corrupt power structure. Ironically, it appears from Potash's narrative that Tupac Shakur was allegedly waging an underground war to destroy the corrupt power structure by politicizing gangs.

By the first decade of the 21st century, the academy began to deepen the scope of their analysis on Tupac Shakur in ways that pushed beyond narratives that focused on his family's revolutionary background, his alleged gangster rapper persona, and the infamous East Coast – West Coast feud that allegedly led to his death and the death of the rapper Biggie Smalls (Christopher Wallace). Scholars Rhonda Wells-Wilbon, Nigel D. Jackson, and Jerome H. Schiele, for example in "Lessons from the Maafa: Rethinking the Legacy of the Slain Hip Hop Icon Tupac Amaru Shakur," offered a fresher approach to how its readers can assess the legacy of Tupac Shakur in terms of Black Power. These academicians suggested that their audience view Tupac's legacy within an Afrocentric paradigm using the life cycle of the Maat, Maafa, and Sankofa paradigm. Although Afrocentrism has roots stemming from the late 18th and early 19th century, it became popular in the Black Power era with the rise of African American studies programs in the late 1960s and 1970s. In looking at the Maat, Maafa, and Sankofa paradigm, Wells-Wilbon, Jackson, and Schiele start with a premise similar to Dyson. They take a look at the duality in Tupac's personality and liken it to double consciousness. W.E.B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folks* coined the term "double consciousness" to describe the condition in which a person of African American heritage has two states of consciousness

dwelling simultaneously in one human body. One state of consciousness is channeled via their own Black or African identity or psyche. The other is through an American identity, which they subsume through years of living in America and adopt a pathology in which they constantly view themselves through the eyes of European descended Americans. Ultimately, Du Bois concluded that this state of double consciousness is problematic for African Americans as they are torn between two worlds and judge themselves by a standard that is hostile to their existence because they are consistently viewing themselves "...through the eyes of others."

Returning back to Wells-Wilbon, Jackson, and Schiele's work is the notion that Tupac Shakur's life and legacy cannot be viewed adequately in the Black Power vacuum. They suggest that Tupac be viewed within the lens of an Afro-centric framework by using the concept of Maat. Maat represents African generation and connectedness in which African descended people are functioning together as members of a complete whole.³² It is a state of wellness. Maafa represents degeneration and the disconnectedness of Black people. Sankofa is a regeneration period preparing one to return to an optimal state of well-being.

Collectively, the Maat, Maafa, Sankofa can be used to explain Tupac Shakur in terms of a griot and revolutionary whose love for his people led to his demise. He is a revered shahidi or martyr who died for his people, dying not for what he personally

³² Rhonda Wells-Wilbon, Nigel D. Jackson, and Jerome H. Schiele. "Lessons from the Maafa: Rethinking the Legacy of Slain Hip-Ho Icon Tupac Amaru Shakur," *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 40, no. 4, (March 2010): 511.

believed in but what the people he sought to represent believed in³³ or had become. Thus, his coining the acronym, T.H.U.G. L.I.F.E (or The Hate You Give Little Infants F*cks Everyone) is suddenly substantiated and not merely double consciousness. The so called thug that Tupac speaks of "... is simply the end result of racism, oppression, and African cultural alienation."³⁴ Further, when Tupac gave voice to the millions of African Americans, particularly Black men for whom thug life is a day to day reality, the African American community did not come to Tupac's aid and allowed him to be persecuted.

Additionally, Wells-Wilbon and Jackson posit that in traditional African society, there is the concept of the community protecting its youth by forming a circle around them and not allowing their backs to remain uncovered.³⁵ Hence, Wells-Wilbon and Jackson are suggesting that T.H.U.G. L.I.F.E. is the result of the community's failure to protect the members of their village. Moreover, they argue that the African American village failed to rise to the occasion to protect Tupac when he was persecuted for diagnosing, giving voice, and publicly exposing the T.H.U.G. L.I.F.E. states that millions of the Black underclass in America had fallen prey to. "His experience will acquire a revival and vitality when Africans assume a posture of Maat and Sankofa and as values and behaviors become conversant by those dynamics."³⁶ Ultimately, according to Wells-Wilbon and Jackson, Tupac is viewed as a master story teller who takes on the role of

³³ Wells-Wilbon, Jackson, and Schiele, 523.

³⁴ Wells-Wilbon, Jackson, and Schiele, 523.

³⁵ Wells-Wilbon, Jackson, and Schiele, 523.

³⁶ Wells-Wilbon, Jackson, and Schiele, 524.

soldier and educator in order to challenge white supremacy and domination upon African people. His rap tunes tell of the plight of Black people in the post Black Power era and their reality while living in the Maafa. Viewed within this vein, Tupac's songs rest within the ethics posited by Black Arts Movement intellectuals such as Amiri Baraka, Maulana Karenga, and Addison Gayle. Tupac gave the world a functional and revolutionary art that pushed for socio-political agitation by telling the stories of Black American people who were trapped in crime ridden black ghettos as victims of police brutality, joblessness, or under-employment.

By 2011, Karin L. Stanford's "Keepin' It Real in Hip Hop Politics: A Political Perspective of Tupac Shakur," emerges to argue that the academy has failed to take an in depth look at Tupac's political ideology and activism. Stanford argues that Shakur's political ideology is posited in Black nationalism, particularly revolutionary nationalism, and in Black Power as was articulated by the Black Panther Party. Stanford debunked the Thug narrative that main stream media has advanced regarding Tupac Shakur. Instead, she argues that Tupac was politically engaged in all stages in his life. She like Potash insists that the Thug Life persona advanced was merely Tupac's effort to identify with the masses for the purpose of politicizing them. Moreover, Stanford distinguishes Tupac from rapper activists who merely rap about social ills but are often absent from genuine political work.

Stanford argues that Tupac Shakur's political work began at age seven and continued to his death. Additionally, she contends that Tupac's political ideology was firmly rooted in Black Nationalism which stemmed from his family's political work in

the Black Panther Party. Stanford recounts that his mother, Afeni Shakur, stepfather Mutulu Shakur, and godfather, Geronimo Pratt were all influential in the development of Tupac's political ideology. Additionally, Watani Tyehimba, Tupac's manager played a vast role in developing Tupac's political ideology as a teenager verging upon adulthood. Not only was Tyehimba, Tupac's manager, a community activist and leader of the New Afrikan People's Organization (NAPO), a Black nationalist and socialist organization committed to building a state in the deep south for Black people with whom they refer to as New Afrikans. Tyehimba was instrumental in Tupac joining the New Afrikan Panthers, the youth branch of the NAPO.

Further, Stanford's essay argues that in Tupac's book of poetry, *The Rose that Grew from Concrete*, one can see where Tupac's political ideology is clearly rooted in his family's Panther roots. The poems encompassing Tupac's book of poetry were written by Shakur when he was only nineteen. *The Rose that Grew from Concrete* includes love poems and poetry that reveal Tupac's more sensitive side. Equally important are his socio-political poems which were noted in Stanford's essay. His socio-political poems provide insight on Tupac Shakur's political ideology as a burgeoning adult. Two examples of this are "Liberty Needs Glasses" and "How Can We Be Free." In "Liberty Needs Glasses," Tupac highlights America's hypocrisy and injustice toward people of color, among those listed were his stepfather, Mutulu Shakur, and godfather, Geronimo Pratt, Nelson Mandela, and Native Americans. In this poem, Tupac indicts lady liberty for endangering Black males and stated that if "she really valued life and cared about the masses," she would get new glasses. In "How Can We Be Free," a transference of the

Black Panther ideology is apparent as Tupac conjures up political prisoners such as Nelson Mandela who was imprisoned in South Africa and George Jackson, Huey Newton, and Geronimo Pratt who were all political prisoners in America. In this poem, Tupac also vehemently condemns police brutality and joining the armed forces which the Panthers likewise fought against as indicated by their appearance as points within the Ten Point Program.

Lastly, Stanford likened Tupac's activism toward cultural nationalism but not as practiced in the 1960s. Tupac was aware that he did not have the political backing of an organization like the Black Panther Party of his mother's 1960s era to support a social movement and bring about social change for the masses. In lieu of the organizational presence that was widespread in the Black Power era to fight for Black liberation for the black masses, Tupac used Black American culture as a mechanism for politically organizing, much in the same way that Gil Scott Heron and James Brown did in the Black Power Era.³⁷ Specifically, Stanford suggests that Tupac used hip hop culture as a mechanism to get the attention of the youth with hopes to later awaken the masses and invoke political awareness. Stanford drives this point by arguing that Tupac's attire, which often included oversized baggy jeans, white tees, and a body covered with tattoos, was a political tool. She argues that his attire and tattoos coupled with his general lack of respect for the socio-political mores of mainstream society were organizing tools designed to attract those who have been disadvantaged or imprisoned.

³⁷ Karin L. Stanford. "Keepin' It Real in Hip Hop Politics: A Political Perspective of Tupac Shakur," *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 42, no. 1, (January 2011): 15.

Stanford's argument becomes a plausibly, apparent hypothesis that is worthy of consideration when one considers Jeremy Prestholdt's article, "The Afterlives of 2Pac: Imagery and Alienation in Sierra Leone and Beyond." In this article, Prestholdt illustrates how Tupac imagery has been used globally by militants to spark protest movements and revolution. Prestholdt recounts the story of how Tupac imagery was used by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), a rebel group in Sierra Leone. RUF rebels, who mainly consisted of disadvantaged urban and rural youth, were fighting in a civil war in Sierra Leone. The rebels sought to overthrow the government and donned themselves in Tupac Shakur T-shirts and paraphernalia as they valiantly fought. Tupac's rhetoric of alienation resonated with the rebels because it mirrored their experiences. The RUF rebels represented the most marginalized of the rural and urban poor who were more often than not limited in either education or social mobility.³⁸ Lastly, Prestholdt provides examples of how Tupac imagery has been used globally in others parts of the world such as in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Guadalcanal, an island in the South Pacific, to protest injustice and to incite wars led by the oppressed.³⁹ Tupac's words may have indeed been prophetic when one recalls that he once proclaimed to the world that "he may not change the world but he would definitely spark the brain that will change the world."⁴⁰

³⁸ Jeremy Prestholdt. "The Afterlives of 2Pac: Imagery and Alienation in Sierra Leone and Beyond," *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, vol 21, no. 2 (December 2009): 197-204.

³⁹ Prestholdt, 197-204.

⁴⁰ *Tupac Resurrection: In His Own Words*, special collectors ed. DVD (Hollywood: Paramount Pictures, 2017).

After reviewing the literature relevant to hip hop and the Black Power and Arts Movements, it is easy to see the parallelisms that exist between the Black Power Movement with that of political hip hop music. Scholars have done well in documenting that there is a connection between the Black Power and Black Arts movements via its connection to cultural icons of the 1960s Black Power era found throughout hip hop music and the sprinkling of Panther ideology found in politically oriented hip hop, especially politicized gangsta rap. Yet, despite the similarities between hip hop and these movements, the researcher finds that there are gaps in the narratives that tell the story of how hip hop music was impacted by these movements. This paper seeks to narrow this gap by providing a content analysis that will analyze selected politically oriented hip hop compositions by Tupac Shakur and compare them the Black Panther Party's Ten Point Program.

CHAPTER 3

THE HISTORY OF BLACK POWER AND HIP HOP

Black Power had varying meanings depending on which organization, leader, or individual that one was addressing. Stripped of its emotional connotations, Black Power meant the amassing by Black people of the political, economic, and social power necessary to deal effectively with the problems they faced as a powerless people relegated to a life of poverty in an affluent society.¹ The goals that were commonly agreed upon were to empower Blacks, create a strong racial identity, to reject the social values (especially racism) which were responsible for low status of Blacks in the United States and replace those societal values with an ideology that embraced dignity and Black pride.² Another common thread was the promotion of political and economic power for African Americans. Thus, Black Power can be viewed as a political, economic, and cultural movement that strove to express racial consciousness among American Blacks.

Some Black Power advocates promoted complete separatism and would not work with Whites at all. Others such as the Black Panther Party willingly formed coalitions with those White groups who they believed were revolutionary. Most advocates of Black

¹ *Ebony Pictorial History of Black America*, vol. 3. (Nashville: The Southwestern Company, 1971), 85.

² *Ebony Pictorial History of Black America*, 85.

Power did not embrace violence for the sake of violence but believed in self-defense and self-determination as articulated by Malcolm X. A few embraced violent revolution or revolutionary nationalism. Some of the organizations that advocated Black Power were Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), US Organization (US), and the Black Panther Party (BPP). RAM is an important organization because it influenced both SNCC and CORE. It also aided in the birth of the Black Panther Party and it was the only secular organization that Malcolm X ever joined.

The cultural wing of the Black Power Movement was the Black Arts Movement. The Black Arts Movement led to an explosion of urban African American popular culture. It produced such writers as Amiri Baraka, Nikki Giovanni, and Sonia Sanchez who argued that Black people should not assimilate into White culture but should instead embrace their own culture. Through the arts, the cultural, political, and economic goals of the Black Power movement were expressed. During the Black Arts movement, the phrase “Black is beautiful” was popularized which in itself was revolutionary because often African Americans harbored negative opinions about their skin color, physical attributes, and hair texture. The slogan Black is beautiful called for Black people to embrace their natural beauty and to feel good about their God given features. Furthermore, the Black aesthetic was the driving philosophy within the movement that called for Black artists to create art for Black people and for that art to be judged by a Black standard or value system.

In music the BAM is best expressed in the spoken word poetry of groups like the Last Poets, Watts Prophets, or Gil Scott Heron. Without question political hip hop or message rap's most recent link to the Black Power era is found in the spoken word poetry of these artists. This is evident as one examines the musical repertoire of the DJs during the formative years of hip hop. For most DJs living in the South Bronx during the 1970s, the Last Poets, *Hustlers Convention*, and Gil Scott Heron's "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised" were staple break records in their musical collection. David Toop notes that Bronx rappers often referred to Gil Scott Heron and the Last Poets as the godfathers of political rap.³

Political hip music or rap was quite prevalent during the Golden Era of Hip Hop. During this era there was a re-embrace of the Black Power epoch. Take for example the lyrics of hip hop artists such as Public Enemy, Paris, and Tupac Shakur. After examining the lyrics of some of their music, it is clear that they have been ideologically influenced by the Black Panther Party and Black power ideology. Songs such as "Party For Your Right to Fight" (Public Enemy), and "Panther Power" with versions by both Tupac Shakur in 1989 and Paris in 1990 are just a few of the hip hop songs that bear witness to the influence of the Black Power Movement and more specifically the Black Panther Party. Additionally, hip hop artists, X-Clan and Poor Righteous Teachers, have embraced a brand of Afrocentric hip hop that bears a striking resemblance to the Black Arts Movement. Scholars, such as Decker and Cheney, have noted that during the Golden Era

³ David Toop, *Rap Attack* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2000), 119.

of Hip Hop artists such as X-Clan and Poor Righteous Teachers embraced a brand of cultural nationalism that was reminiscent of the Black Arts Movement. Next, we will examine the history of hip hop music.

History of Hip Hop

Hip hop is a cultural movement that consists of four elements: 1) Djaying or turntablism 2) MCing or rapping 3) break dancing 4) graffiti writing. Djaying or turntablism was the heart and soul of the early hip hop movement. In hip hop's genesis, the DJ, not the rapper, was the focus. The DJ would play music at block parties that would emphasize the break beat or the portion of the song that emphasized the highly percussive pattern. Break dancers would do their best dance movements when they heard the break beat within the song. Break dancing is a highly competitive form of dancing that involves acrobatics such as head spins, back spins, and dance moves such as moon walking, waving, and the robot. Break dancing, in and of itself, has roots in the African Diaspora and is commonly believed to be influenced by capoeira, an Afro-Brazilian martial art created by African slaves brought to Brazil. The last element, graffiti writing or tagging, has been around since antiquity. Scholars have studied the graffiti inscriptions left in the ruins of ancient Pompeii.⁴ The scholarly consensus is that graffiti has been around since the caveman. Although some may view graffiti as non-artistic and mere vandalism, others have employed it to communicate social and political messages and

⁴ Helen H. Tanzer, *The Common People of Pompeii: A Study of Graffiti* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1939), 4.

also see it as art. In the years in between 1970-1971, the center of graffiti writing moved to New York City. Hip hop's tie to graffiti writing arises from graffiti writers participating in other elements of hip hop culture, such as break dancing, Djing, or MCing. Because the focus of this thesis is concerned with the impact of the Black Power and Black Arts Movements upon hip hop music, the historical discussion, thereby focuses on hip hop music.

The history of hip hop culture and music began in the early 1970s in South Bronx, New York. During this period in American history, Black Power organizations were being targeted by the United States federal government's counterintelligence program known as COINTELPRO. COINTELPRO brought about a watershed of repression as it covertly destroyed Black nationalist organizations that strove to create political, social, economic, and cultural revolutions for African Americans and other oppressed people in the United States. The goal of COINTELPRO was not just to end the Black Liberation movement, but it also sought to prevent the rise of future Black messianic leaders and to thwart the political literacy and potential of Black youth. Many Black nationalists were either killed or imprisoned, or fled the country as a result of the government's clandestine operation. COINTELPRO was successful in carrying out its mission. It ultimately produced a vacuum effect in Black communities throughout the nation.

In America's urban areas, crime escalated as the Black middle class and working-class families, as a result of desegregation, moved out of the old and more established neighborhoods into the suburbs that were initially reserved for Whites. Drugs, especially

heroin, and gangs filled communities that once were beacons of hope. In South Bronx, New York where hip hop culture was created by Afro-Diasporic youth representing African American, Afro-Caribbean, and Latino ethnicities, the community was plagued by poverty, community decay, and the proliferation of drugs and gang violence.

Additionally, the South Bronx community became the victim of urban renewal during the early 1970s. People were moved from different parts of New York into the South Bronx in order to complete the Cross Bronx Expressway, which cut directly through the center of the most heavily populated working-class areas in the Bronx.⁵ Tricia Rose, author of *Black Noise* noted over 170,000 residents, the majority of which being Black or Hispanic, were relocated into South Bronx. During this time New York City was having economic problems and by the mid-1970s, the city had already filed bankruptcy. This resulted in New York City's commitment to assisting poor neighborhoods like South Bronx being severely limited or non-existent.

The year 1968 has specific significance in that it is marked as the year in which both the youth gangs returned to the Bronx and the Black Panther Party's subsequent arrival in New York to establish offices in Harlem, Brooklyn, and the Bronx. Many of the Panther recruits were former gang members who now promoted the Panther's Ten Point Program instead of gang activity. Jeff Chang in *Can't Stop Won't Stop* documents the alliances that the Young Lords Party, a Puerto Rican offshoot of the Black Panther Party, made with the Bronx gangs, such as the Savage Skulls in 1970. Collectively, the Lords

⁵ Tricia Rose, *Black Noise* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 31.

and Savage Skulls hijacked an X-RAY truck from Lincoln Hospital in order to provide free services to their communities.⁶ Interestingly enough, at the height of COINTELPRO, the youth gangs such as the Savage Skulls and Black Spades were left to fill the void of the revolutionaries. Often, it was the gangs that worked to push junkies and drug dealers out of the community.⁷

Simultaneously, the disco era occurred during the 1970s along with the germinating hip hop movement. However, for many South Bronx youth, the disco craze had limited appeal. Hip hop music was a kind of rebellion against disco music. Moreover, disco music focused on smooth blending of sounds between one record to the next and some in the Bronx may have viewed it as uncreative in comparison to the musical style developing in the ghettos of South Bronx.

The Bronx youth preferred more funk-based sounds that contained a percussive extension that could be experienced by its local mobile DJs who played records containing Tito Puente's drumming solos and the soulful sounds of James Brown. Also, another reason that disco had limited appeal to many of the South Bronx residents was that its youth could not afford the prices at the discotheques frequented by middle class Blacks. They also were opposed to mandatory dress codes and preferred to adorn themselves in attire that consisted of tennis shoes, jeans, and Kangols [a type of beret

⁶ Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005), 48.

⁷ Chang, 49.

popularized in the 1960s by the elite and by the hip hop community in the 1980s].⁸ The dances held by these mobile DJs in community centers, parks, and house parties helped bring former rival gangs together. Additionally, the structure of gangs mutated into relatively peaceful groups, referred to as crews.⁹ It was from this context that the South Bronx youth built a culture that not only served as “an outlet of self-expression and identification”¹⁰ but it also simultaneously proved to be an alternative to gang violence that had infiltrated their communities.

Hence, some gangs moved away from illegitimate activities to legitimate business ventures such as providing security for hip hop parties. One reason that this may have occurred is because some gangs sought to take advantage of the self-help projects funded by government grants that were influenced by self-community empowerment and the Black pride ideologies of the Black Power Movement. As a result, social clubs designed to encourage constructive rather than violent forms of competition developed. From these clubs or crews emerged the major components in hip hop culture: graffiti tags, deejaying, break dancing, and rap music.

Because hip hop culture was created by youth whose ancestors were products of the African Diaspora, it is quite easy to find African influences and retentions in the culture. Hip-hop music is especially indebted to Mother Africa’s history of oral

⁸ Kurtis Blow, “Kurtis Blow Presents The History of Rap, Vol 1: The Genesis,” CD-ROM (Rhino Entertainment, 1997), 5-6.

⁹ Toop, 14.

¹⁰ Rose, 33.

performance. From pattin juba, which is a style of dance brought to the Americas by African slaves in the 1850s to the African American traditions of signifying or “playing the dozens” and toasting, these are all cultural transports from Africa into the New World. This can be clearly evidenced if one considers the African griot’s role as a storyteller. Take for example the egotistic self-assertion and playful attack of one’s competitor in many rap songs and compare it with the value that African tribes assigned to oral humor, confidence, and derision. Also, note that in pattin juba, African-Americans “traded tall tales, handed out verbal abuse in rhymes, and provided their own rhythmic, chest whacking, thigh slapping accompaniment.”¹¹

Additionally, another contributor to the genre of rap music is the urban street language that developed in the streets among Chicago’s African-American community in 1920.¹² Along with the urban street language, one cannot forget the immeasurable contributions that came from Black disc jockeys (DJ’s). In short, many people do not realize that there have been many musical and oral predecessors and precursors of rap music in the African-American community. Some of which are the Last Poets, the Watts Prophets, Gil Scott Heron, Millie Jackson, H. Rap Brown, Malcolm X, the Black Panthers, the classic Blues women, Muhammad Ali, and a score of others. The funk music that was ushered in by James Brown in the 1960s and was popularized by the

¹¹ Khephra Burns, “Word from the Motherland,” *Essence*, August 1991, 44.

¹² Encarta Africana, “Rap,” Eric Bennet, http://www.africana.com/research/encarta/tt_153.asp {accessed January 22, 2008}.

1970s by groups like Parliament was also a precursor to hip hop, with many hip hop artists sampling James Brown's "Say It Loud I'm Black and Proud," "Funky Drummer," and "Soul Power."¹³

The pioneers of hip hop culture were Afro-Caribbean DJs who excelled at the art of mixing music and highlighting the break beat. In any dialog concerning hip hop's pioneers, the names of three DJs always seem to arise: Kool Herc (Clive Campbell), Afrika Bambaataa, and GrandMaster Flash (Joseph Saddler). Hip hop or rap music evolved via the use of mobile DJs who later employed MCs to chant over the break beats. The MCs later were referred to as rappers. Kool Herc was the first to come on the scene in 1973 and gain accolades for his acumen. After seeing Kool Herc play at parties, Bambaataa and Grand Master Flash were heavily influenced by his DJing skills and began to play at block parties, parks, and house parties beginning in 1974.

DJ competitions occurred during this era in which DJs battled for territorial rights and privileges. DJ Kool Herc's territory was the West Bronx, Afrika Bambaataa controlled the Bronx River East, and Grand Master Flash reigned in the southern and central sections (137th Street to Gun Hill Road).¹⁴ DJ Breakout was a popular disc jockey in the northern most section of the Bronx.¹⁵ However, it was the break beats coming from Kool Herc's Herculoids. Herc referred to his music sound system as the Herculoids. His

¹³ Ricky Vincent, "The Genius of Funk," *American Legacy: The Magazine of African American History and Culture*, Fall 2004, 65.

¹⁴ Rose, 53.

¹⁵ Rose, 53.

sound system inspired the other DJs and served as a catalyst to a new genre of Black and popular music known as rap or hip hop music.

Kool Herc, who is often referred to by many as the father of hip hop, was heavily influenced by musical traditions from his birth country of Kingston, Jamaica. Born in 1955, Herc at the ripe age of twelve immigrated to New York with his family. However, it was in his native hometown of Kingston where he learned the art of toasting and transported it to New York. Jamaican toasting involves the DJ engaging in humor, speaking, and syncopation over remixed instrumental versions of records. Herc would toast on the mic to improve crowd response, engage the audience, and get better audience participation at his parties. He is credited as the first DJ to use a MC at his parties. Herc employed the skills of his friend, Coke La Rock to act as MC. Coke would introduce Herc and provide vocals to improve the show and entertain the dancers. The role of the MC was to lead a call and response session or chant over the beat as the DJ played the music. This created an atmosphere that sparked the crowd's enthusiasm while at the same time giving the people a more exciting dancing experience.

As a DJ, Herc popularized using two turntables to mix records on his sound system. He is also credited with masterfully creating the break beat, which is central to rap music. Herc would extend the drum solo or break beat by buying two copies of each record and then he manipulated the turntables such that when the break ended on one turntable, he could start it over again on the next one. He called this technique the "merry go round," and the crowd loved it. In Kurtis Blow's "The History of Rap, Vol 1," he

notes how the kids from South Bronx and Harlem loved his ghetto style, which gave way to the concept of the B-boy. The B-boy –or beat boy, break boy, Bronx boy—loved the breaks of Kool Herc and as a result break dancing was soon created.¹⁶ Herc also gained fame as a DJ because of his powerful sound system. It was said to be so loud that no other DJ could compete with him in park jam battles as another pioneer in rap music and hip hop culture, Afrika Bambaata, soon discovered.

A historian and founder of the Zulu Nation, hip hop godfather and DJ, Afrika Bambaataa (Afrika Bambaataa Aasim), is considered the father of the Electro Funk sound, and is also known as the “master of records.” According to Nelson George, Bambaataa’s most important contributions to hip hop have been sociological.¹⁷ His Zulu Nation, which will later be discussed, de-emphasized gang fighting and instead focused on competing peacefully via the three elements of hip hop. Further, Bambaataa attended Herc’s parties as a teenager and being the avid record collector that he was soon discovered that he had many of the same tunes. However, he distinguished himself from Herc via introducing a wider range of musical styles and genres into Djing, fusing rock, R&B, soul, funk, DC go-go music, soca, African, Caribbean, Latin, and classical music to create a new sound. This earned him the title of “master of records.”

¹⁶ Kurtis Blow, “Kurtis Blow Presents The History of Rap, Vol. 1: The Genesis,” CD-ROM (Rhino Entertainment, 1997), 5.

¹⁷ Nelson George. *Hip Hop America*. (New York: Viking Penguin, 1998), 18.

As stated previously, gangs were always a part of hip hop culture since its onset. However, they served the art form well and profoundly impacted the culture. Bambaataa was a former gang member turned mobile DJ and an important innovator of hip hop culture. Bambaataa was a member of the gang known as the Black Spades. Nelson George, in *Hip Hop America* seems to indicate that hip hop helped phase out gang violence in New York City and Afrika Bambaataa's Zulu Nation was in the forefront of this transformation. Bambaataa founded the Zulu Nation in 1974 and this organization brought together Blacks and Puerto Ricans, mobile DJs, graffiti artists, b-boys and b-girls (known as breakers or break dancers outside of the Bronx community), and MCs (later known as rappers). The Zulu Nation offered an alternative to gang violence in that the group de-emphasized crime and fighting. The focus was on competition in dance, MCing, and DJing. The creations of these artists evolved into what is now labeled as hip hop culture and Afrika Bambaataa is credited with naming the newly developing culture as hip hop culture. What the Zulu nation gave the inner-city youth was not just entertainment; but rather, it provided a competitive non-violent means of communicating. Many critical figures of the period such as the break dancing team, the Rock Steady Crew and DJ-producer Afrika Islam, were members of the Zulu Nation. Today the Zulu Nation is still a thriving organization that serves as a vanguard of hip hop culture.

Grand Master Flash, (born as Joseph Saddler), began his involvement in hip hop as a mobile DJ in 1974 and later became a renowned recording artist with his group the Furious Five. Grand Master Flash and the Furious Five featured Flash's masterful DJing

skills and the rapping skills of his crew. As a DJ, Flash advanced the art of mixing, leading to the development of punch phrasing and back spinning. In punch phrasing, also known as the quick mix, Grand Master Flash, played a musical phrase or a vocal fragment from a record on one turntable while it continued on the other record --and “break spinning,” also known as back spinning, which means to alternatively spin both records backwards to repeat the same phrase over and over.¹⁸

Scratching although created by Grand Wizard Theodore, Flash’s young protégé, became popularized by Flash. During parties, Flash would often make the microphone available for MCs or rappers to use as a medium to entertain the audience vocally while he worked the turntables. The first person to pick up the microphone at his party was Keith “Cowboy” Wiggins, an MC who became a regular part of his act in 1976.¹⁹ Cowboy’s claim to fame was his commanding voice, a magnet to female listeners. Shortly thereafter, four other rappers joined Flash’s crew and they became known as Grand Master Flash and the Furious Five. Eventually, Flash and his crew became one of the hottest rap groups in the Bronx as they played at clubs, parks, vacant lots, and basketball courts. At one of the events with Flash and the Furious Five, the new wave pop star Blondie, Debbie Harry, observed them and was so mesmerized by what she saw that

¹⁸ George, 19.

¹⁹ Kurtis Blow, “Kurtis Blow Presents The History of Rap, Vol. 1: The Genesis,” CD-ROM (Rhino Entertainment, 1997), 11-12.

she vowed to make a record about them.²⁰ In the tune, “Rapture” Harry gave Grand Master Flash recognition as she told the world about Flash’s parties.

Despite Grandmaster Flash’s and the Furious Five’s local fame, they were surprised with the 1979 release of “Rapper’s Delight,” a rap record by an unknown New Jersey group who called themselves the Sugar Hill Gang. The hip hop community at large was equally stunned. Despite being aware that rapping was a favorite pastime among urban youth, the pioneers of hip hop did not believe a rap song could be a commercially viable product. Take for example, H. Rap Brown in *Die Nigger Die*, notes that as a young Black man he learned how to talk or rap by hanging out in the streets and “playing the dozens.” Consider also record producer, Paul Winley who was also well aware of the popularity of rap among New York’s Black youth in the 1970s and subsequently frequently produced break records such as *Super Disco Brakes* that he would later sell to ghetto youth who would buy his records just so they could rap over it. Winley also noted that in the 1970s one of his daughters was a rap fanatic who spent a good deal of her personal time writing rhymes and rapping. So what surprised Winley and the pioneers of rap was not that rapping was popular among New York’s inner-city youth, instead they were surprised by rap music’s commercial success with those outside of the inner-city urban community and hip hop culture. However, upon discovery of the

²⁰ Chuck Miller, “GrandMaster Cuts Faster: The Story of GrandMaster Flash and the Furious Five,” *Goldmine*, 1997, 4-5.

commercial success of this cultural product, the pioneering DJs rushed to record rap records themselves.

Grand Master Flash and the Furious Five signed with Enjoy Records and released “Superrappin” in 1979. “Superrappin” did not get much radio airplay nor did the group receive the coveted fame they desired. In fact, the attention they received was pale in comparison to what the Sugar Hill Gang received when “Rapper’s Delight” was released earlier in 1979. The success of Grand Master Flash and the Furious Five all changed when the group was signed by Sugar Hill Records which resulted in hip hop traveling from the local parks of 137th Street and Gunhill Road where Flash played to radio stations everywhere in the nation and abroad.

By July 1982, Grand Master Flash and the Furious Five recorded the first commercially successful message rap, which ironically was entitled “The Message.” “The Message” is a socially conscious hip hop song that segued message rap to create a new genre of music identified as political hip hop. The lyrics of “The Message” speak about how hard life is for ghetto dwellers, urban decay, drug infested communities, crime, crooked cops, homelessness, joblessness, and the sense of hopelessness that was prevalent in the Black and Brown ghettos during the Reagan era. Ronald Reagan’s presidential era was criticized by Black American’s because of its record on slashing federal programs to aid the poor, youth, and unemployed. There was an increase in homelessness during the Reagan presidency. Additionally, Ronald Reagan supported apartheid in South Africa and his record of opposition to Civil Rights legislation such as

the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act, of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968 resulted in many Black Americans accusing him of attempting to “roll back the clock,” or in other words, return to the era in American history in which states’ rights was the norm. Prior to “The Message” in 1980 Kurtis Blow released the message rap, “The Breaks,” which spoke of bad luck and hard times. “The Message” distinguishes itself from “The Breaks” as a transitional rap song leading to the genre of political hip hop music because “The Breaks” addressed life’s realities in a jovial manner and it did not discuss the socioeconomic and political issues affecting urban poor and working-class families.

Nevertheless, it was not until Brother D released “How We Gonna Make the Black Nation Rise” in 1983 that there was an explicitly political hip hop record with a Black nationalist message interjected in hip hop music. The lyrics of the song speak to America’s mistreatment of Native Americans and Blacks and the attainment of education and political organizing skills as being the necessary ingredients for a rising Black nation. Later in 1983, White drummer Keith LeBlanc released “No Sell Out” which contained snippets of Malcolm X’s speeches over heavy drum beats. In 1987 Run DMC released “Proud to be Black,” a song in which the group Run DMC boldly proclaimed that they were “proud to be Black.” However, it was not until the Golden Era of Hip Hop Consciousness, which began in 1987, that two groups, Public Enemy and Boogie Down Productions emerged to boldly express Black rage and invoke Black nationalist rhetoric reminiscent of the Black Power and Black Arts eras. In fact, Public Enemy as well as

other lyricists from the Golden Era of Hip Hop such as Paris were known for ideologically promoting a brand of hip hop nationalism that drew inspiration from Black Power organizations such as the Black Panther Party. In this thesis we will focus on the music of Tupac Shakur and examine selected songs by Shakur to determine if they include ideology from the Black Panther Party within its lyrics.

Biography of Tupac Shakur

Tupac Amaru Shakur was born on June 16, 1971 in New York City, NY.²¹ Both of his parents were members of the Black Panther Party. His mother, Afeni Shakur, was a high-ranking member of the New York chapter.²² She is well known for her participation in the Panther 21 trial and for defending herself in court when the Panther 21 case went to trial as noted by Phillip Foner, Jamal Joseph and a plethora of historians. In the Panther 21 trial of 1969, twenty-one members of the New York chapter of the Black Panther Party were charged with conspiracy against the United States and attempted murder.²³ Afeni defended herself and won. Tupac was born, just one month after his mother's acquittal.²⁴ Jamal Joseph states that originally Tupac was given the name Parish Lesane

²¹ Vanessa Satten, "True Blood," *XXL Magazine*, September 2011, 47.

²² Jasmine Guy, *Afeni Shakur: Evolution of a Revolutionary* (New York: Atria Books, 2004), 49.

²³ Philip S. Foner, ed. *The Black Panthers Speak* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), 159-161.

²⁴ Jamal Joseph. *Tupac Shakur Legacy*. (New York: Atria Books, 2006), 6-9.

Crooks, allegedly because Afeni feared that her newborn son's life was in eminent danger.²⁵ Therefore, she disguised his identity with a birth name that would provide him anonymity from his family's revolutionary political connections and her enemies.²⁶

Tupac's father, Billy Garland was a member of the New Jersey chapter of the Black Panther Party.²⁷ Tupac first met his birth father at age seven.²⁸ According to Afeni and Tupac, Garland was absent from his son's life until Tupac became an adult. Garland rejects this view. In an interview with XL Magazine, Billy Garland states that although he lived separately from Afeni, he was "around the family for his son's early childhood."²⁹ Tupac's Panther pedigree extends to include his stepfather, Mutulu Shakur, who is still currently considered by many a political prisoner in the U.S. penitentiary system for the alleged robbery of an armored Brinks truck which led to the death of two police officers; his godmother is Assata Shakur, a former Black Panther and Black Liberation Army member. Assata Shakur has been living in exile in Cuba since her 1973 escape from a New Jersey prison for allegedly killing a New Jersey policeman. Elmer Geronimo Pratt was Tupac's godfather and a high ranking Black Panther falsely convicted and

²⁵ Joseph, 9.

²⁶ Joseph, 6-9.

²⁷ Satten, 47.

²⁸ Joseph, 40.

²⁹ Satten, 47.

imprisoned in 1968 for murdering a school teacher during a robbery. Years later his sentence was also overturned.

Born in the heart of the Black Power era to parents who were revolutionaries, it seems inevitable that Tupac Shakur would inherit his family's activist roots. At age seven, Tupac had delivered his first speech at a Panther rally to free, Geronimo Pratt³⁰. By age ten, when the family pastor, Reverend Daughtry asked a youthful Tupac Shakur what he wanted to be when he grew up, Tupac responded that he "wanted to be a revolutionary."³¹ One finds that even in elementary school, Tupac was a budding revolutionary. In elementary school, he organized his peers to protest when his favorite teacher was fired.³²

Tupac Shakur lived in New York City with his mother and sister, Sekyiwa from 1971-1984.³³ During this period, the Shakur's suffered financial hardships that forced the family to move frequently and even live in homeless shelters.³⁴ This seemed only to fuel young Tupac to pursue his passion and develop his rapping and acting skills. Even

³⁰ Joseph, 12.

³¹ Armond White, *Rebel for the Hell of It: The Life of Tupac Shakur*, (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1997), 1.

³² Karin L. Stanford, "Keepin' It Real in Hip Hop Politics: A Political Perspective of Tupac Shakur," *Journal of Black Studies* 42, no. 1 (January 2011): 9.

³³ Darrin Keith Bastfield, *Back in the Day: My Life and Times with Tupac Shakur* (New York: Ballantine Publishing Group, 2002), 15.

³⁴ White, 32-33.

though it was difficult, his mother would frequently enroll him in dance, music and creative arts workshops as well as acting classes.³⁵

With his mother's help, Tupac joined a Harlem Theater group known as the 127th Street Ensemble.³⁶ By age 12, Tupac landed his first acting role as Travis in the Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*.³⁷ Tupac spent this period of his life engaging in normal childhood activities such as attending school, karate practice as well as attending family and cultural gatherings. Afeni always made sure that Tupac's activities as a child included political activism such as attending political rallies and engaging in community activism.

By 1982, Tupac's stepfather Mutulu Shakur would be added to the FBI's Ten Most Wanted Fugitive's list allegedly for his participation in a 1981 Brinks robbery. This resulted in Afeni losing her job as a legal assistant because of her association with Mutulu. The loss of income brought extreme financial hardship to the family. By 1985, the Shakur's moved to Baltimore in hopes of finding a better fate. Life was still hard for the Shakur's in Baltimore, but Tupac met friends, started to write raps and perform in various rap contests in Baltimore under the name, MC New York.³⁸ His talent was soon recognized, and Tupac was accepted into the prestigious Baltimore School of Performing

³⁵ Joseph, 12.

³⁶ Joseph, 12.

³⁷ Joseph, 13.

³⁸ Joseph, 17.

Arts (BSA). At the BSA, he becomes popular. His rapping, acting, and personality became a magnet that helped him befriend students of all races and cultures.³⁹ While popular, his activism continued to grow. This time he became involved with the local communist party youth group in his area.⁴⁰

Unfortunately, hard economic times continued for the Shakur's. Tupac is forced to leave the Baltimore School of Performing Arts without graduating. In 1988 the family moves to Marin City, California.⁴¹ This was an unsettling period in life for Tupac. He and his mother were constantly fighting. Life's struggles lead to Afeni becoming addicted to crack cocaine.⁴² Tupac leaves his mother's home but has difficulty maintaining a stable living arrangement and sustaining himself. He even briefly sold drugs but stopped because "it did not feel right" as noted by scholar and family friend Joseph Jamal.⁴³

By 1989, Tupac's fate begins to shift. He becomes the national spokesperson for the New Afrikan Panthers, a youth group that was inspired by the legacy of the Black Panther Party of the 1960s and 1970s. Additionally, his career in entertainment is sparked when he starts a new rap group called Strictly Dope with his friend Ray Luv (Ray Tyson). The group is managed by his mentor and friend, Leila Steinberg. In 1990

³⁹ Joseph, 18-19.

⁴⁰ Bastfield, 67-68.

⁴¹ Bastfield, 164.

⁴² Joseph, 23.

⁴³ Joseph, 24.

Steinberg uses her connections to help Tupac get a job with the rap group Digital Underground as a dancer and roadie.⁴⁴ By 1991, Tupac gets signed with Interscope Records and releases his debut album, *2Pacalypse Now*. Throughout his rap career, Tupac used his rap songs and fame to speak out about a variety socio-political issues in the Black community such as police brutality, drugs, poverty, joblessness, racism, and injustice. Some of his lyrics also uplifted women, particularly Black women.

Although Tupac would gain fame as a rapper, he also became recognized for his acting skills. He appeared in movies such as *Juice* (1992), *Poetic Justice* (1993) and *Above the Rim* (1994). Lesser known are his skills as a poet. He wrote many poems which are included in his book of poetry entitled *The Rose That Grew from Concrete*. Prior to his death in 1996, he founded several rap groups: Thug Life of which he was a member,⁴⁵ Dramacydal, and the Outlawz.⁴⁶ Tupac will forever remain one of the greatest rappers who lived in the 20th century, both for his immense musical talent and his social and political activism.

⁴⁴ White, 36-39.

⁴⁵ Joseph, 33.

⁴⁶ Molly Monjauze, *Tupac Remembered: Bearing Witness to a Life and Legacy* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, LLC, 2008), 152.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

In this thesis, at least one song has been selected from the first five studio albums recorded by Tupac Shakur. Four of these albums were released prior to his untimely death. The remaining album was released two months after Tupac died. The five studio albums in this study are: *2Pacalypse Now* (1991), *Strictly 4 My Niggaz* (1993), *Me Against the World* (1995), *All Eyes on Me* (1996), and *The Don Killuminati: The Seven Day Theory* (1996). Additionally, one posthumous album, *Beginnings: The Lost Tapes 1988 – 1991* has been included. *Beginnings: The Lost Tapes 1988 – 1991* was recorded when Tupac was a teenager during the period of his life where he was a member of the rap group, Strictly Dope. The songs that were selected for analysis were only selected if there was evidence of the Black Panther Party's Ten Point Program within the song lyrics. If there was no Panther ideology present within the lyrics of the song, the track was eliminated. Shown next in Table 1 is a list of songs selected from each album.

Table 1. Selected Discography of Tupac Shakur

Song	Album / Year Released
Trapped	2Pacalypse Now, 1991
Wordz of Wisdom	2Pacalypse Now, 1991
Holler If You Hear Me	Strictly 4 My N.I.G.G.A.Z., 1993
Me Against the World	Me Against the World, 1995
Only God Can Judge Me	All Eyez on Me, 1996
White Man'z World	Makaveli the Don Killuminati:The Seven Day Theory, 1996
Panther Power	Beginnings: The Lost Tapes 1988 – 1991

Additionally, Table 2 illustrates the tenets within the Ten Point Program that each song adheres.

Table 2. Tupac Shakur Songs and Ten Point Program Adherence

Songs	Free- dom & Self Deter- mina- tion	Full Employ- ment	End Black Exploita- tion by Whites or Capitalists	Descent Housing	Educa- tion about Black History & Deca- dent Nature of Ameri- can Society	Exemp- tion of Black men from military service	End Po- lice Bru- tality	Liber- ate Black prison- ers (male) & murder of Blacks	Trial by peers or Black Com- munity	Land, Bread, Housing, Educa- tion, Clothing , Justice & Peace
Trapped	X						X	X		
Words of Wisdom	X	X		X	X					X
Holler if you Hear Me		X					X			X
Me Against the World	X	X	X		X					X
Only God Can Judge Me	X									X
White Manz World	X	X			X			X		X
Panther Power	X	X	X		X					X

From *2Pacalypse Now*, which is the debut album for Tupac Shakur, “Trapped” and “Wordz of Wisdom” were the songs selected for analysis. These songs address police brutality, racism, and Black liberation. Three singles were released from the album: “Brenda’s Got a Baby,” “Trapped,” and “If My Homie Calls.” At the onset, the album was controversial because it featured topics that were heavily debated and of grave concern to the African American community in the 1990s. These topics included the War on Drugs, Black-on-Black crime, poverty, white supremacy / racism, employment, and

police brutality. “Trapped” and “Wordz of Wisdom” spoke to these issues. Moreover, Tupac’s lyrics address various tenets of the Black Panthers Ten Point Program.

In “Trapped,” freedom & self-determination, police brutality, and liberation of Black prisoners are the salient points within the Ten Point Program that appear as themes in the song. “Trapped” narrates the story of a young Black man living in a crime ridden community from which he wishes to escape. This environment was filled with violence, racial profiling, and police brutality. Tupac narrates how the police harass a young Black man despite there being no probable cause. Tupac raps:

Can barely walk the city streets
 Without a cop harassing me, searching me
 Then asking my identity
 Hands up, throw me up against the wall
 Didn't do a thing at all
 I'm telling you one day these suckers gotta fall
 Cuffed up throw me on the concrete
 Didn't do a thing at all
 I'm telling you one day these suckers gotta fall
 Cuffed up throw me on the concrete.

“Trapped” paints a picture of a person who, while minding his own business, is stopped, searched, and assaulted by law enforcement. In the rap tune, Tupac reveals that the police officer’s actions are unjust and that the officers are stalking the individual with the intent to fatally harm him. What is unbeknownst to the officers is that this time their proposed victim is a self-determined Black man who is equipped to defend himself against police violence. In verse two, Tupac’s lyrics state:

Coppers try to kill me
 But they didn't know this was the wrong street

Bang bang, count another casualty
But it's a cop who's shot for his brutality.

The song is reminiscent of how the members of the Black Panther Party and other Black Power militants advocated self-defense. In the song, the frustrated young man shoots the police officer who was stalking and abusing him. The Black Panther Party did not sanction violence, but the party did advocate self-defense. When the Black Panther Party emerged as an organization in 1966, they publicly challenged police brutality in Oakland while armed. As a result, they became the targets of intense police harassment. Consider the incident in which Black Panther co-founder Huey P. Newton was stopped by the Oakland police. The incident resulted in Newton being convicted of manslaughter for allegedly shooting the officer in self-defense.¹ Both Huey Newton and the young man who Tupac raps about in “Trapped” fought against police brutality and exercised their right to bear arms to defend themselves. Tupac’s song “Trapped” speaks to the Panther rhetoric and the ideology of self-defense.

Moreover, despite the violent conditions in which the unnamed person who is the subject of Tupac’s song dwells, it is apparent that this is a young man of a strong constitution. The young man firmly believes that he will prevail and escape the violent environment in which he is encapsulated. Tupac makes this apparent in the chorus when he repeatedly states that you cannot “keep the Black man down.” The song lyrics that express this concept are as follows:

¹ Huey P. Newton, “Trial” in *The Huey P. Newton Reader*, edited by David Hilliard and Donald Weise (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002), 121, 124-5.

Uh uh, they can't keep the black man down
 They got me trapped
Naw, they can't keep the black man down
 Trapped
Uh uh, they can't keep the black man down
 Trapped
Naw, they can't keep the black man down.

The main character in the song heavily laments having to spend the rest of his life in prison as he was arrested and tried for the shooting of the cop. Ultimately, the young man determines that if he is sentenced to prison, he would liberate himself one way or the other. In verse three of “Trapped,” the young man equates life in prison to living in hell and informs the audience of what it feels like to be trapped. He asserts that he would rather die than continue to feel trapped. His lyrics speak to this:

Trapped in a corner Dark and I couldn't see the light
 Thoughts in my mind was the nine and a better life
 What do I do? Live my life in a prison cell?
 I'd rather die than be trapped in a living hell.

In “Wordz of Wisdom,” which also appears on the *2Pacalypse Now* album, Tupac Shakur accuses White America of Black genocide while he simultaneously scolds Black America for not fighting its victimizers. In the lyrics of this song, Tupac warns Black America that its youth are being targeted by America for extermination. Their extermination will be accomplished by a variety of means such as mis-education, murder, the criminal justice system, and passive acquiescence to their own systematic destruction. In verse one of “Wordz of Wisdom,” Tupac says that America is “Killing us one by one.” He states, “In one way or another, America will find a way to eliminate the problem.”

According to Tupac, that problem is Black youth. Tupac then informs the Black community of the various insidious schemes to eliminate their youth in ways that mirror the COINTELPRO program that killed the Black revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. He raps:

We are being wiped off the face of this earth
At an extremely alarming rate
And even more alarming is the fact
That we are not fighting back.

“Wordz of Wisdom” is a Black nationalistic song filled with sentiment from the Black Power movement. In contrast to the Civil Rights movement, the song reflects the rhetoric of armed self-defense as opposed to non-violence. The Black Panther Party championed self-defense and had the temerity to teach, recruit, and politically educate the Black masses, especially the lumpen proletariats who the Panthers believed had the greatest potential for revolution. Huey P. Newton, co-founder of the Black Panther Party stated:

If revolution does not occur almost immediately, and I say almost immediately because technology is making leaps (it made a leap all the way to the moon), and if the ruling circle remains in power the proletarian working class will definitely be on the decline because they will be unemployables and therefore swell the ranks of the lumpens, who are the present unemployables. Every worker is in jeopardy because of the ruling circle, which is why we say that the lumpen proletarians have the potential for revolution, will probably carry out the revolution, and in the near future will be the popular majority. Of course, I would not like to see more of my people unemployed or become unemployables, but being objective, because we’re dialectical materialists, we must acknowledge the facts.²

² Huey P. Newton, “Speech Delivered at Boston College: November 18, 1970” in *The Huey P. Newton Reader*, edited by David Hilliard and Donald Weise (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002), 166.

Tupac inherited the idea of the revolutionary potential of the lumpen proletariat (lumpen) from his Panther family lineage. In “Wordz of Wisdom,” Tupac appears to be inducing the lumpen to fight for social justice and Black rights. In his song lyrics, Tupac refers to the lumpen as “niggas.” Like the Panthers, in “Wordz of Wisdom,” he seems to be reminding them that fighting back is honorable. He also uses lines from Harlem Renaissance writer, Claude McKay. In his poem “If We Must Die,” McKay also calls the oppressed to fight and to be willing to die “like men.” Tupac likewise challenges Black men in his song (with whom he refers to as niggas) to fight. In contrast to the racist use of “nigger,” Tupac’s, “niggas” are not men of ill repute. Tupac anchors this revised definition of the term with a different spelling. For Tupac “nigga” means “**never ignorant always getting goals accomplished** as indicated by the song lyrics of “Words of Wisdom” below:

When I say "nigga" it is not the nigga we have grown to fear
 It is not the nigga we say as if it has no meaning
 But to me it means **Never Ignorant Getting Goals Accomplished**, nigga
 Niggas, what are we going to do?
 Walk blind into a line or fight
 Fight and die if we must die, like niggas.

It is also clear upon reviewing the song lyrics for “Words of Wisdom” that both the niggas that Tupac speaks of and Huey Newton’s lumpen proletariats share key qualities like being unemployed or unemployable. Tupac, in his open call to recruit the lumpen proletariats refers to them as the lower classes, the masses or the ones left out when companies were dispensing jobs and opportunity. Tupac’s call for Blacks to become self-determining and to fight for their freedom reflects point one of the Panther’s

Ten Point Program. His protest against under employment is reminiscent of the Black Panther's demand for full employment - point two of the Ten Point Program. Tupac states that

This is for the masses, the lower classes
The ones you left out, jobs were giving, better living
But we were kept out
Made to feel inferior, but we're superior.

Throughout the song, Tupac virtually spits out point five of the Black Panther Party Ten Point Program. Tupac denounces the inaccurate version of history fed to Black Americans that makes them subservient to white supremacy. In doing so he aligns with The Black Panther Party's demand for education that exposes the true nature of decadent American society. Specifically, point five called for education that teaches Blacks their true history and role in current society. Like the Panthers, Tupac's "Wordz of Wisdom" seeks to instruct the masses to critically think and "break the chains" of fear. Moreover, in "Wordz of Wisdom," Tupac spells out American hypocrisy and accuses Lady Liberty of both lying and robbing him of his history. Tupac's rap lyrics are an embodiment of this:

Pledge allegiance to a flag that neglects us
Honor a man that who refuses to respect us
Emancipation, proclamation, Please!
Nigga just said that to save the nation
These are lies that we all accepted
Say no to drugs but the governments' keep it
Running through our community, killing the unity
The war on drugs is a war on you and me
And yet they say this is the Home of The Free
But if you ask me it's all about hypocrisy

Lady Liberty still the bitch lied to me
 Steady strong, nobody's gonna like what I pumpin'
 But it's wrong to keeping someone from learning something
 So get up, it's time to start nation building
 I'm fed up, we gotta start teaching children
 That they can be all that they wanna to be
 There's much more to life than just poverty.

Here Tupac Shakur's poetic discourse demands that Black America rethink its allegiance to those institutions within American society that have continually disrespected their humanity. Verse one instructs his audience to challenge the American mythology that the Emancipation Proclamation freed Blacks from American slavery. Instead, Tupac informs his audience that the true purpose of the document was to preserve the economic interests of the ruling classes of the American regime.

"Wordz of Wisdom" also addresses points four and ten of the Ten-Point Program. The former is the call for decent housing and the latter is the call for land, bread housing, education, clothing, justice, and peace. Tupac indirectly demands decent housing (Point #4) by denouncing America for keeping poor Blacks trapped in the ghetto. More specifically, his lyrics condemned America for "false imprisonment [and] for keeping [Blacks] trapped in the projects" and in poverty. Inherent in Tupac's analysis is the fact that when Black Americans make errors in judgment that lead to imprisonment, it becomes a difficult obstacle to overcome in terms of acquiring employment, housing, and achieving the American Dream. Although Tupac did not elaborate on the interconnectivity between imprisonment and the acquisition of decent housing (Point #4), law professor, Michelle Alexander in the *New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age*

of Colorblindness eloquently outlines the structural racism that hinders former inmates from obtaining gainful employment and fair and decent housing. Point ten of the Ten Point Program demands land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice, and peace as well as a United Nations supervised plebiscite. Tupac talks about this by contrasting America's land of opportunity global image with the daily reality of Black Americans. Malcolm X said that while others see an American dream, Black people see an American nightmare. In the American nightmare that is lived experience for the Black poor, there is a need for land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice, and peace. Tupac expresses this in these lyrics:

Now every brother had to smother on the welfare line
 The American dream, though it seems it's attainable
 They're pulling your slave, don't believe
 Cause it will strangle yeah
 Pulling the life of your brain, I can't explain.

Strictly 4 My N.I.G.G.A.Z. was Shakur's second studio album. It was released in 1993, the year when Tupac became immersed in legal issues. Despite legal issues, his album sold millions of copies as it reached platinum status. Several singles were released from this album: "Holler If Ya Hear Me," "Keep Your Head Up," "I Get Around," and "Papaz Song." The first release from the album was "Holler If Ya Hear Me" and it is the song that has been selected for analysis. "Holler If Ya Hear Me" was selected because it contains a discourse that speaks directly to young African American men who are unemployed and feared by American society. These are men whom Tupac refers to as N.I.G.G.A.Z - "never ignorant getting goals accomplished." The "Z" makes it plural.

The tenets within the Ten-Point Program that “Holler If Ya Hear Me” address are full employment, ending police brutality, and the demand for land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice, and a United Nations supervised plebiscite for the Black nation. The song lyrics paint an image of African American men raising their voices in unison to be heard in a society that has rendered them voiceless due to their race and social position. It is a battle cry to Black males – urging them to wake up, pick up the gun, and fight. The men in this rap song are those forced to secure their livelihood via the underground economy. The men are presented as angry due to the lack of opportunity available to them and also because of the fragility of their financial status. In verse one of the song, African American men band together to lift their voices to speak out against poverty and encourage each other to take up arms. Tupac states that they are “lookin’ down on the barrel of my nine” in protest to the brittleness of their economic status. His query, “How long will it last 'til the po' gettin mo' cash” indicates that the lack of economic opportunity is the root cause of their rage. He continues to rap in verse one:

And the punk police can't fade me, and maybe
 We can have peace someday, G
 But right now I got my mind set up
 Lookin down the barrel of my nine, get up
 Cause it's time to make the payback fat
 To my brothers on the block better stay strapped, black
 And accept no substitutes
 I bring truth to the youth tear the roof off the whole school
 Oh no, I won't turn the other cheek
 In case ya can't see us while we burn the other week
 Now we got a nigga smash, blast
 How long will it last 'til the po' gettin mo' cash
 Until then, raise up!
 Tell my young black males, blaze up!

In verse two and three, the spirit of Black male lumpen proletariat revolution crescendos. The verses start out condemning Black sellouts. As the verses progress, Tupac juxtaposes Black sellouts who are living lavishly, (presuming that their wealth was achieved by selling out to the masses) and the lumpen who are angry and want immediate change from the economic hardships due to the imposed lifecycle of poverty, crime, police harassment, and violence. Because of this trap, the African American men portrayed in this song are pushed to take up arms to fight their oppressors as opposed to passively acquiescing to their allotted social and economic condition. Tupac's lyrics:

Holla if ya hear me
 PUMP PUMP if you're pissed
 To the sell-outs, livin it up
 One way or another you'll be givin it up, huh
 I guess cause I'm black born
 I'm supposed to say peace, sing songs, and get capped on
 But it's time for a new plan, BAM!
 I'll be swingin like a one man clan
 Here we go, turn it up, don't stop
 To my homies on the block gettin dropped by cops.

In verse three, Tupac again suggests that there is a lack of viable economic opportunity in the Black communities where these African American men dwell. In his rap narrative, Tupac indicates that there is an immediate need for food, clothing, and shelter. "Whatever it takes to live" which seems to indicate that the men in his community have to utilize whatever options are available to survive. Tupac presents a visual image where jobs are scarce and solidifies this idea via the expression "crime and rhyme" as the only two choices that are available to the men in this community for survival. Tupac is raising awareness regarding the need of employment for young Black

men which is exactly what point two of the Ten Point Program demands - the need for full employment. Tupac also makes it clear that until the conditions outlined in point ten of the Ten Point Program are satisfied for this demographic, there will be no peace.

Hence, the men in his song are appropriately portrayed as angry Black men. Tupac's rap lyrics are also suggesting that this demographic has become a part of the underclass and that the men featured in the song want to break the cycle of poverty. This becomes clear when Tupac states, "It's time for a new plan, BAM!/I'll be swingin like a one-man clan."

"Holler If Ya Hear Me," is also Tupac's ode to point seven of the Ten Point Program which demands "the immediate end to police brutality and harassment." His reference to Black men being targets of the police makes that clear especially in the line, "To my homies on the block getting dropped by the cops." Moreover as the title of "Trapped" suggests, the African American men in this song are systematically trapped in the vicious cycle of joblessness, homelessness, crime, the penal system, and brutality by police. The song lyrics in verse three that speak to this idea are below:

Will I quit, will I quit?
 They claim that I'm violent, but still I kick
 Representin, never give up on a good thing
 Wouldn't stop it if we could it's a hood thing
 And now I'm like a major threat
 Cause I remind you of the things you were made to forget
 Bring the noise, to all my boyz
 Know the real from the bustas and the decoys
 And if ya hustle like a real G
 Pump ya fists if ya feel me, holla if ya hear me
 Learn to survive in the nine-tre'
 I make rhyme pay, others make crime pay
 Whatever it takes to live and stand
 Cause nobody else'll give a damn
 So we live like caged beasts

Waitin for the day to let the rage free
 Still me, till they kill me
 I love it when they fear me.

The lyrics in “Holler If You Hear Me” address police brutality and call for an immediate end to police brutality in a similar fashion that the Black Panthers demanded an immediate end to police brutality. Point seven of the Ten Point Program called for the immediate end to police brutality and murder of Black people. In the “What We Believe” section for point seven, the Panthers stated that the Second Amendment bestowed the right to bear arms and that all Black people should arm themselves for self-defense.

Additionally, in point ten of the Ten Point Program, the Black Panther Party stated that if the government does not meet the needs of the people, the people have the right to overthrow the government. “Holler If Ya Hear Me” echoes these sentiments. In the chorus of the song, there is a continuous repetition of the phrase “Holler If Ya Hear Me/ Hard/ Tellin you to hear it/ The rebel.” These lines depict Tupac as a rebel who is encouraging a band of Black men to declare war on a society that has declared war on them. Tupac masterfully uses this repetition via call and response in an effort to reinforce the ideas that he is attempting to convey.

In the music video for the song, a father is shot by the police, and his young child witnesses the murder. While Tupac is rapping, there are backdrop scenes with the Black community protesting the murder of the father. The video also captures the child’s mother lamenting the death of her husband. Lastly, in the final clips of the video, the young boy finds a bag of money and buys a gun. The young boy is later found at the

shooting range practicing on an unidentified target. The irony of the story is that when the young boy takes off his hat, it is discovered that the young person whom the video has depicted as a young boy is really a girl. As dramatic as this may seem, Tupac's original version of the music video was an even stronger reflection of the Panther's position on self-defense and fighting against police brutality. In an interview with *Hip Hop DX*, an online magazine, the director of the video, Stephen Ashley Blake³ stated that the plot in the official video is not the original plot crafted by Tupac. Blake indicated that in the original music video designed by Tupac, the policeman is actually killed. Blake stated, "Originally, the way I shot [the video], Tupac kills the cop and [the cop's] badge falls down in slow motion. The record label was very nervous about that."⁴

Apparently, during the filming of "Holler If Ya Hear Me," Tupac's record label, Interscope, was involved in an lawsuit stemming from an incident in which a police officer was shot by a motorist while listening to Tupac's music. Moreover, Blake affirms that Tupac had a strong message of self-defense in the face of police brutality. Interscope censored Tupac's original concept. Both the lyrics of "Holler If Ya Hear Me," and the music video mirror point seven of the Ten Point Program. They each advocate self-defense in response to police brutality and the murder of Black people.

³ Mitchell Steinfeld. "Interscope Records Censored Tupacs "Holler If Ya Hear Me" Message, Video Director Alleges," HiphopDx.com, December 16, 2014, under "News" <https://hiphopdx.com/news/id.31778/title.interscope-records-censored-2pacs-holler-if-ya-here-me-message-video-director-alleges#> {accessed May 12, 2018}.

⁴ Mitchell Steinfeld. "Interscope Records Censored Tupacs "Holler If Ya Hear Me" Message, Video Director Alleges," HiphopDx.com, December 16, 2014, under "News" <https://hiphopdx.com/news/id.31778/title.interscope-records-censored-2pacs-holler-if-ya-here-me-message-video-director-alleges#> {accessed May 12, 2018}.

Me Against the World is Tupac Shakur's third studio album. The album was released on April 1, 1995 while Tupac was in prison for sexual abuse. Music critics hail this album as being his greatest album. It sold more units than his previous two albums which included more socially conscious songs. The album is extremely introspective. Lyrically, it seems to be Tupac's response to the dramatic events that occurred in his life almost immediately after releasing his first album. For example, one month after the release of his debut album, *2Pacalypse Now*, in November 1991, Tupac was beaten by the Oakland police during a jay walking incident.⁵ Five months later, in April 1992, the national media blamed Tupac for shooting Bill Davidson, a Texas state trooper, because the actual shooter - nineteen-year-old Ronald Ray Howard - was listening to Tupac's music on his compact disc.⁶ Another incident occurring in 1992 was the accidental shooting of a six year old bystander in Marin City at an outdoor festival.⁷ By February 1993, Tupac's second album is released.⁸ One month later an altercation occurs with his limo driver that leads to Tupac being arrested on drug charges.⁹ In April of 1993, Tupac is arrested again for swinging a bat at a local rapper at a concert.¹⁰

⁵ Tayannah L. McQuillar and Fred L. Johnson PhD, *Tupac Shakur: The Life and Times of an American Icon* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2010), 90-91.

⁶ Joseph, 29.

⁷ Armond White, *Rebel for the Hell of It* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1997), 214.

⁸ Joseph, 29.

⁹ White, 215.

¹⁰ White, 215.

By the fourth quarter of 1993, Tupac is again arrested in October, allegedly for shooting at two off duty policemen who were harassing a Black motorist.¹¹ The following month, he is accused of sexual assault¹². By March 1994, he is again in trouble and is behind bars for fifteen days for punching a movie director.¹³ In September 1994, Tupac finds himself once again under fire when his song “Souljah’s Story” is cited as the inspiration behind two Milwaukee teens murdering a cop.¹⁴ In yet another dramatic turn of events, on November 30, 1994, Tupac is robbed and shot five times at Quad Studios in New York; one day later he is convicted for sexual abuse, a crime he went to his grave refuting;¹⁵ and on Valentine’s Day, February 14, 1995, he goes to Riker’s Island penitentiary to begin serving his sentence for sexual abuse.¹⁶

Based on the turbulent events that were occurring in Shakur’s life, one finds that the rap songs that appear on the album *Me Against the World* reflect a mood of despair and speak to the emotional chaos that Tupac had experienced since his debut album, *2Pacalypse Now*. These rap tunes present to the world a reflective Tupac Shakur. The album reflects upon the effects, consequences, and repercussions of living a fast-paced

¹¹ Joseph, 32.

¹² Joseph, 35-36.

¹³ White, 215.

¹⁴ White, 215-216.

¹⁵ Joseph, 35-39.

¹⁶ White, 216.

life riddled with crime, violence, death threats and death. His lyrics suggest that such a life is unworthy of glorification.

The song selected for analysis, “Me Against the World,” is taken from the album’s name. “Me Against the World” was selected because several tenets of the Ten Point Program are present. The song contains rap vocals by both Tupac Shakur and his rap group, the Outlawz (originally known as Dramacydal). At the time of the release of *Me Against the World*, the group was called Dramacydal and consisted of Malcolm Greenridge (stage named as E.D.I. Mean after the former African President, Idi Amin), Yafeu Akiyeli Fula (stage named as Yaki Kadafi after former Libyan President, Muammar Gaddafi), and Katari Terrence Cox, Tupac’s cousin (stage named as Kastro after Fidel Castro). Tupac wanted the group’s members to have stage names of political figures that were so called enemies of America.¹⁷ Of the four rap verses on the song, Tupac raps on verses one and four. The Outlawz rap on verses two and three. “Ending the Robbery by the White Man (or Capitalist) of Our Black Community” is the third point of the Ten Point program and is the one to which this song speaks to most. In verse one, Tupac sets the tone for the song by recounting the crime-ridden conditions imposed on urban American ghettos. His lyrics’ paint the picture of young Black men manipulated to kill each other in record numbers. Tupac raps about how he is tormented by his failure to reroute youth to more positive directions. From his perspective, this is because the youth are “addicted to the killing” they constantly see in their environment as recorded below:

¹⁷ Molly Monjauxe, *Tupac Remembered: Bearing Witness to a Life and Legacy* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, LLC, 2008), 152.

Verse 1: 2Pac

Though bodies is droppin' there ain't no stoppin' me
 Constantly movin' while makin' millions
 Witnessin' killings, leavin' dead bodies in abandoned buildings
 Can't reach the children, 'cause they're illin'
 Addicted to killin' and the appeal from the cap peelin'
 Without feelin', but will they last or be blasted?
 Hard-headed bastard, maybe he'll listen in his casket
 The aftermath: more bodies bein' buried
 I'm losin' my homies in a hurry, they're relocatin' to the cemetery
 Got me worried, stressin', my vision's blurry
 The question is will I live, no one in the world loves me
 I'm headed for danger, don't trust strangers
 Put one in the chamber whenever I'm feelin' this anger
 Don't wanna make excuses
 Cause this is how it is, what's the use?
 Unless we're shootin', no one notices the youth
 It's just me against the world, baby.

In verse two, Outlawz member Yaki Kaddafi adds to Tupac's narrative by poignantly exclaiming "he needs someone to help" him because he is "out here all by himself." Kaddafi's lyrics speak to the fact that T.H.U.G. L.I.F.E., as diagnosed by Tupac, does not occur among urban youth because young Black men are born murderers or are inherently criminals; rather, thug life occurs because young Black men are too often being left to navigate their way through life absent of the correct role models they crave to guide them to manhood. In Kaddafi's verse, one sees a consistent cry for someone to provide another route for young American Black males such as himself because eventually he, as a "veteran, villain, and young thug," will certainly fall by the wayside or either perish by the bullet. The following lyrics speak to this:

Verse 2: Yaki Kadafi

Could somebody help me? I'm out here all by myself, see
 Ladies in stores, Baby Capone's, livin' wealthy
 Pictures of my birth on this Earth is what I'm dreamin'
 Seein' Daddy's semen, full of crooked demons
 Already crazy and screamin', I guess them nightmares as a child
 Had me scared but left me prepared for a while
 Is there another route for a crooked Outlaw?
 Veteran, a villain, a young thug, who one day shall fall.

In verse three, Outlaw member E. D. I. Mean advances the narrative that Tupac and Kadafi set forth in the first two verses. First, E. D. I. Mean reiterates what has been already stated about the prevalence of homicide in urban communities with his line: “Everyday there's mo' death.” He then moves the narrative forward by hinting to possible sources for the crime that is widespread within inner city urban communities throughout the nation. Subtlety, he identifies joblessness as the culprit. Also, in E. D. I. Mean’s rap verse, it uncovers that there is a need for employment and more specifically for Point Two - the demand for full employment. E. D. I. Mean consistently alerts listeners to the fact that there is a scarcity of money available. Moreover, this verse suggests that because of the lack of money and limited employment options, an alternative method of acquiring the funds needed for subsistence was secured and in this case it was theft and crime. The lyrics that state this are below:

Verse 3: E.D.I. Mean

Everyday there's mo' death, and plus I'm dough-less
 I'm seein' more reasons for me to proceed with thievin'
 Scheme on the schemin' and leave they peeps grievin'
 'Cause ain't no bucks to stack up

My nuts is backed up, I'm about to act up
 Go load the MAC up, now watch me klacka
 Tried makin' fat cuts, but yo, it ain't workin'
 And evil's lurkin, I can see him smirkin' when I gets to pervin
 So what? Go put some work in and make my mail
 Makin' sales, riskin' 25 with a L, but oh well.

Verse four begins by Tupac posing the ominous question of whether oppression, which has been a constant feature in his life, will follow him in his death. Oppression for the Shakur family, like many Black families living in America, has been pervasive and inescapable. Additionally, it becomes apparent by verse four that the first three verses are merely describing the symptoms of oppression. In verse four, Tupac is formally diagnosing oppression as the root cause for each of the scenarios that he and the Outlawz rapped about in the first three verses as he analyzes oppression against the socioeconomic political climate within the era in which he is living. This becomes evident when Tupac rhymes “they punish people that’s asking questions.” This line of his rap verse portrays America as a repressive force that stifles the voices of its citizens who question its oppressive norms. Tupac’s exposes America for what he considers hypocrisy for promoting “freedom of speech” on the one hand while punishing a free thinker on the other. The lack of one’s ability to question authority and to possess self-determination runs in stark contrast to point one of the Panther’s Ten Point Program – Freedom and Determination. Tupac’s rap verse encourages his fan base to self-educate and stand up for their rights. Below is a portion of verse four’s lyrics:

Verse 4: 2PAC

With all this extra stressin'
 The question I wonder is after death, after my last breath
 When will I finally get to rest through this oppression?
 They punish the people that's askin' questions
 And those that possess steal from the ones without possessions
 The message I stress: to make it stop, study your lessons
 Don't settle for less, even the genius asks his questions
 Be grateful for blessings.

In the fourth verse, Tupac also takes lyrical aim at American Capitalism - point three of the Ten Point Program. His critique comes in one simple line, "And those who possess steal from the ones without possession." This line addresses the Black Panther Party's call to put an end to the economic "exploitation of Black communities." Originally, point three stated, "We want an end to the robbery by the White man of the Black community." By 1971, they revised the language used in point three to account for the fact that Whites were not the sole exploiters of the Black community. The Panthers evolved to accommodate for the fact that sometimes other ethnic groups exploit the Black community. Sometimes to a lesser extent, Blacks exploit other Blacks. Point 3 in its revised verbiage now stated: "We want an end to the robbery of the Black Community by Capitalists."

Ultimately, the Black Panther Party identified capitalism as both the foe and source of Black America's oppression and poverty of all races. The Black Panther Party believed that Black Americans suffered from oppression because of capitalism not racism. Although racism existed and was a problem, the ruling elite class used racism as a tool to ensure its own economic survival and to maintain control over the masses of all

races and ethnicities. Prominent Panther, Afeni Shakur, Tupac's mother obviously influenced her son's view. While imprisoned in the Women's House of Detention for the famous Panther 21 case, she wrote:

. . . We know that wealth is not the fruit of labor but the result of organized protected robbery. But you teach the poor workers to be honest. We know that the Almighty dollar which everyone is taught to revere is only guaranteed by slavery and exploitation. We know that we live in an inhumane world of poverty. We know that we are a colony, living under community imperialism. The U.S. is not one of freedom, beauty, and wisdom, but of fear, terror, and hate. This is the nation of your laws, run by your police, based upon protecting your economic strength. The poor are politically, economically, and legally non-existent that is why in jail 80% of the inmates are non-white and all are poor. Yet, even sociologists admit that 80% of these are innocent. . . .¹⁸

Consistent with her son's lyrics, Afeni Shakur highlights that imperialism legitimizes robbery of poor and working-class Americans and creates an exploitive system of cyclical poverty for which there is no way for the poor to escape. Other Panthers echoed this sentiment. Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton often gave speeches about how the poor are exploited and robbed by businessmen, politicians, and the elite. One such example is when the Panthers set up their Free Food Program and accused businesses of robbing the people. They vilified business owners and in blunt terms stated how large businesses are pariahs: "... This robbery is clearly pronounced in the ridiculously high prices [consumers] must pay for food which is necessary for [their]

¹⁸

Phillip S. Foner, ed. *The Black Panthers Speak* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), 162.

daily sustenance.”¹⁹ The Panthers noted that in cases such as these, the people should boycott the establishments that are exploiting them. Specifically, the Black Panther Party accused the businessmen of robbing the poor because they took from the community and never deposited back into it. Prices were raised at rates that were astronomically above the community’s ability to pay and still live decently. In response to this the Panthers also created the free food and free breakfast programs. Bobby Seale’s chastised the exploiters:

When the stores and milk companies don’t donate, people should leaflet the community. Any particular chain food stores that can’t donate a small percentage of its profits or one penny from every dollar it makes from the community, to Breakfast for the Children and other community programs should be boycotted. We don’t ever threaten or anything like that but we tell the people in the community that the businessman exploits them and makes thousands and thousands of dollars and that he won’t donate to a Breakfast for Children Program that’s actually tax deductible. This is exposing the power structure for what it is, the robbery of poor oppressed people by the avaricious businessmen. Black, brown, and red people, and poor whites can all have the same program, and that means we’re breaking down racism and focusing on the power structure.²⁰

Huey P. Newton, in several of his speeches, also noted how capitalism was the root cause of oppression for not only Black people but all oppressed people. Newton made exception for those Black capitalists who supported the community initiatives such as the Survival Programs and agreed that they should in turn receive the support of the community. He believed that Black capitalists were also exploited by the power structure,

¹⁹ David Hilliard, ed. *The Black Panther Party: Service to the People Programs/The Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 39.

²⁰ Bobby Seale. *Seize the Time* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), 414.

and that they could be comrades if they adhered to the needs of the community. Newton argued the Black capitalist is a victim in the capitalistic system, and Black businessmen are exploited by the large White corporate capitalistic monopolies.”²¹ For Newton, political education for the Black capitalists, like the lumpen proletariat, was the key to them becoming one with the people.

Though coming a generation later, Tupac’s lyrics could be seen as one of Newton’s educational vehicles. In the subsequent lines of the fourth rap verse, Tupac expounds on both points three and point five. Essentially, he provides two suggestions to end the exploitation of the Black community by capitalists. First, he promotes the strategy of self-education – sparked by them questioning everything. Here is an excerpt of the lyrics within the fourth verse that address point five of the Ten Point Program, “The message I stress/ to make it stop, study your lessons/ Don’t settle for less, even the genius asks his questions/ Be grateful for blessings.” This strategy runs rampant throughout Panther ideology.

Next, Tupac uses the Panther slogan of “Power to the People.” “Power to the People” puts the question of Panther influence to rest. There is not a more recognizable slogan associated with the Black Panther Party. Tupac’s use of the slogan “Power to the People” is an evocation Black Panther Party’s belief that unity of the masses is the most effective strategy for dislodging oppressor hegemony. When the Black Panther Party

²¹ Huey P. Newton, “Black Capitalism Re-Analyzed I” in *The Huey P. Newton Reader*, edited by David Hilliard and Donald Weise (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002), 232.

coined the phrase “All Power to the People,” Chairman of Defense Huey Newton, like Tupac after him, wanted Black people (and the oppressed) to possess the power to control their own destiny as a people.²² Moreover, the Panthers believed that as the vanguard of the revolution, their role was simply to raise the consciousness of the people and once the consciousness of the people was raised, the people themselves would enact change. In unison with Panther ideology, Tupac’s lyrics advocate that the people have the power to change conditions in their communities. Just as the Panthers in his mother’s era were able to enact change, Tupac tells his audience that the key is in the hands of the people - not the politicians. Tupac’s lyrics are:

Don't ever change, keep your essence
 The power is in the people and politics we address
 Always do your best, don't let the pressure make you panic
 And when you get stranded
 And things don't go the way you planned it
 Dreamin' of riches, in a position of makin' a difference
 Politicians are hypocrites, they don't wanna listen
 If I'm insane, it's the fame made a brother change
 It wasn't nothin' like the game; it's just me against the world.

Lastly, it appears that Tupac’s optimism is diminished by the current state of despair in Black America. Near the end of his verse, his rap lines indicate that despite his high hopes, dreams, and ambitions of acquiring riches for the sole purpose of making a difference, the world in which he lives lies in opposition to the community of ethics preached by the Black Panther Party. For Tupac there is no longer a highly visible community of Black Americans dedicated to the liberation of Black people, and he

²²

Newton, 227.

begins to perceive himself alone - just him against the world. Tupac and Puff Johnson (the female vocalist who appears in the hook of the song), echo this sentiment throughout each verse of the song when they sing “It’s just me against the world.” For Tupac, the tightly-knit Black Panther Party cadre of families from his youth who were dedicated to accomplishing the goal of Black empowerment have either been killed, imprisoned, or exiled for political reasons. Tupac found no replacement. Scholars Wells-Wilbon et al, in “Lessons from the Maat: Rethinking the Legacy of Tupac Shakur” echo this sentiment when they placed Tupac’s life within an African paradigm in which Tupac represents a martyr, a griot, and one abandoned by his people while giving voice to their struggle.

Wells-Wilbon et al. stated that

In traditional African societies, adults formed a circle that enveloped the children and youth, so they were always protected. This literal and metaphoric configuration exposes the backs of the adults to outside forces yet embraces everyone within one circle. When this tradition is not practiced, children are left with their backs uncovered, and adult support systems are often undependable. Thus, we have what Tupac coined, T.H.U.G. L.I.F.E. (The Hate You Give Little Infants Fucks Everyone). A Thug is the end result of racism, oppression, and African cultural alienation.²³

All Eyez on Me is the fourth studio album released by Tupac Shakur and the first album that he recorded under the Death Row record label. The album was released on February 13, 1996. By April 25, 1996, it reached the status of quintuple platinum. The album contains several hits such as “California Love,” “How Do U Want It,” “I Ain’t

²³ Rhonda Wells-Wilbon, Nigel D. Jackson, and Jerome H. Schiele. “Lessons from the Maafa: Rethinking the Legacy of Slain Hip-Hop Icon Tupac Amaru Shakur,” *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 40, no. 4, (March 2010): 523.

Mad at Cha,” and “2 of Amerikaz Most Wanted.” Despite its commercial success, the album lacks the socially conscious commentary found on Tupac’s previous albums.

Many of the songs on *All Eyez on Me* have themes that deal with enacting revenge upon betrayed friends, nihilism, and partying. It also appears that Tupac’s association with Death Row, his personal squabbles with other rap artists, and his impending legal issues drove him toward rapping from a gangster perspective as opposed to adhering to socially conscious rap lyrics. In an interview with *LA Times* journalist Chuck Phillips, Tupac explained that the *All Eyez on Me* was a response to the anti-police and misogynistic criticism of his music, especially that which was received from C. Delores Tucker and Bob Dole:

This album is a reaction to the backlash from C. Delores Tucker, Bob Dole, all those people that kept sweating me about the music. Now, I feel as though this album is something for them to sweat. Before my album wasn’t even bad and they was calling me a gangster and just messing up my whole credit line and ruining my reputation. Look at my songs. On the first album, ‘Brenda’s Got A Baby.’ On the second album, ‘Keep Ya Head Up.’ On the third album, ‘Dear Mama.’ Where is the killer music? Where is the make-a-kid-wanna-jump-off-a-bridge shit? I just don’t see it. So now, this album, I didn’t try to make any ‘Dear Mama’s,’ any ‘Keep Ya Head Up’s,’ I just came straight with dealing with my own anger. I’m doing this just for what the music is [to vent] my anger. Getting everything I wanna say out since I can’t express myself in any other way. Plus I was locked down for eleven months so I gotta lot of stress and pressure to get up off my chest. I think I did it on this album. That’s why I stayed in the studio...I wrote only one song in jail. Everything else I wrote while we sat up in here drinking Budweiser. After the Budweiser is gone we have a song usually. With Daz, Johnny J, and I’m about to do one with Sam Sneed right now.²⁴

²⁴

Jay Balfour, “Tupac Shakur Says He ‘Wrote Only One Song In Jail’ In Post Prison Interview

While *All Eyez on Me* bent away from his typical social and political critiques, elements of the Ten Point Program do appear in the song “Only God Can Judge Me.” Moreover, points one and ten of the Ten-Point Program appear as themes in “Only God Can Judge Me.” In point one of the Ten Point program, the Black Panther Party articulated their demand for freedom and self-determination: “We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black Community.” The Panther demand for freedom and self-determination appear throughout the song lyrics of “Only God Can Judge Me.” The song itself contains four stanzas along with an introduction, outro, and hook. Hip hop artist 4-Tay is a featured rapper appearing in the third stanza. All other vocals are by Tupac. Like “Me Against the World,” “Only God Can Judge Me” seems to be Tupac’s response to public opinion surrounding his legal issues, the labeling of his genre of rap music as gansta rap, and criticism regarding his Thug life philosophy. It is clear however when one listens to the lyrics in the introduction section of this song that Tupac is responding to all of the negative public opinion he received. This is evident when he decries “get out of his business” in his song because only God alone is worthy to judge him:

from 1995,” Hiphopdx.com, August 13, 2014 8:00 PM, under <https://hiphopdx.com/news/id.30209/title.tupac-shakur-says-he-wrote-only-one-song-in-jail-in-post-prison-interview-from-1995> {accessed February 22, 2018}.

Intro: 2Pac

Only God can judge me (that right?)
Only God can judge me now
Nobody else (nobody else)
All you other motherfuckers get out my business (really)
Only God can judge me now.

At first glance, this line is a perplexing statement because Tupac was raised in a communal setting. However, when put in context with the Chuck Phillips' interview, Tupac is angrily speaking back to those who failed to realize that his music was not gangster rap and was instead being used by him as a venue to raise political awareness about the living conditions of poor Blacks. Additionally, in examining the first two verses of "Only God Can Judge Me," Tupac's lyrics indicate that he is both disappointed and saddened that someone from the Black community would attempt to kill him. Throughout these verses, Tupac spends most of his efforts pouring out his emotions and recounting his struggle to survive gunshot wounds after being shot. There are flashbacks of hospital scenes and glimpses of his deep emotional despair about being shot juxtaposed with thoughts from his assassin who is depicted in the song as being angry because Tupac survived his gunshot wounds. Moreover, Tupac's own depressive thoughts enter, and he despondently indicates that he too wishes the bullets were fatal. Despite the pain allegedly from the betrayal of friends and community, Tupac manages to interject social conscious lyrics regarding the current state of the Black American poor still trapped in the America's ghettos. He reminds his audience that he was born into poverty and trapped since birth. Additionally, amidst Tupac lamenting about Blacks attacking each

other, he confesses how he always believed that it was the “White Man that he should fear.” Never did he envision fearing his own race.

For Tupac, death was lurking around the corner for him and his family. Through his sadness and even exaggeration, he still exhibited some resilience and the spirit of a fighter. He warns his listeners to beware of the dirty tricks of the media in verse one. In the interlude which occurs after verse one but before verse two, Tupac issues his words of encouragement to himself by repeating the mantra “That which does not kill me can only make me stronger.” He also informs his audiences that he would rather die like a man than live like a coward and then shout “Black Power.” His shout for “Black Power” signals to his listeners that Tupac the revolutionary will fight to the bitter end. The slogan “Black Power” was popularized by Stokely Carmichael while a member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). In a speech delivered on September 8, 1966 at the University of California in Berkeley, Stokely Carmichael defined Black Power as a “psychological struggle” for the liberation of Black people. Carmichael argued that Black power was a “psychological battle on the right of Black people to define their own terms, define themselves, define as they see fit, and organize themselves as they see fit.”²⁵ In his book *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation*, Carmichael refined his definition of Black Power: “It is a call for Black people in this country to

²⁵ Stokely Carmichael. *Stokely Speaks: From Black Power to Pan-Africanism* (New York: Random House, 1966), 59.

unite, recognize their heritage, to build a sense of community. It is a call for Black people to define their own goals, to lead their organizations.”²⁶

Tupac’s “Black Power,” was a reminder and a clarion call for Black people to continue to fight for their rights. His resilience seems to have been transferred to Tupac from his mother Afeni Shakur who fought tirelessly as a member of the Black Panther Party. In the famous Panther 21 case in which Afeni represented herself in Court, she boldly proclaimed to the Court her fight against oppression and injustice: “History shows that wars against oppression are always successful.”²⁷ She later stated that no one would be able stop the victory from occurring.

Not only did the Black Panther Party believe they would win their fight against oppression, but as a Black Power organization advocating socialism, the Black Panther Party believed that if the government did not issue justice in a manner that provided land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice, and peace, the people should move to dissolve the political bands that have connected them with the government. Hence, when Tupac shouts “there is a ghetto up in Heaven, and it’s ours “Black Power” in “Only God Can Judge Me,” he is suggesting that if Black people fight oppression relentlessly and die fighting for their freedom in the form of asserting their right to determine their own destiny as a people, they will win. Heaven in this context can be viewed as a metaphor for the United Nations Plebiscite that the Black Panther Party envisioned in point ten.

²⁶ Kwame Ture and Charles Hamilton. *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation* (New York: Random House, 1967), 44.

²⁷ Phillip S. Foner, ed. *The Black Panthers Speak* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), 163.

Point ten of the Ten Point Program in its original language when it was drafted in

October 1966 stated:

We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice, and peace. And as our major political objective, a United Nations supervised plebiscite to be held throughout the black colony in which only black colonial subjects will be allowed to participate for determining the will of Black people as to their national destiny.

Moreover, this idea of Heaven as a place of refuge for Black people and particularly for Black revolutionaries to ascend is also apparent when one reviews the lyrics in two other songs by Tupac. It is present as a theme in “I Wonder If Heaven Has Got a Ghetto” and also in “Thugz Mansion.” In “I Wonder If Heaven Has Got a Ghetto” which appears on the *R U Still Down* album, Tupac paints a picture of oppressed Black people living in the ghetto who revolt against oppressive conditions. Later, he poses the question if I die, does heaven have a ghetto? Similarly, in “Thugz Mansion” Tupac raps about how he is tired of being shot, chased by the police, and arrested. He follows with the theme found in much of his social conscious music regarding the mistreatment of Blacks at the hands of an oppressive system then he begins to rap about how Black people need a place where they can live among themselves without having to adhere to White society’s standards. For such a place, Tupac creates Thugz Mansion, a heavenly place where thugz can be at peace within a cultural setting that is representative of their background, needs, and ethics. In Thugz Mansion, Tupac tells his listeners that famous Black cultural icons such as Malcolm X, Billy Holiday, Miles Davis have ascended to Thugz Mansion. He even made space in the Mansion for fifteen-year-old Latasha Harlins who was killed by South Korean convenience store owners in the 1990s allegedly for a

bottle of orange juice that she was wrongly accused of stealing. In Thugz Mansion, they have found a place where they can live in peace. In examining Tupac's single "Only God Can Judge Me," the tenets of Freedom and Self-Determination (point one) along with acquisition of a United Nations-supervised plebiscite for Black people (point ten) are the themes or points of the Ten Point Program that are infused within its lyrics. Verse three's lyrics of "Only God Can Judge Me" points to this:

I'm walkin' through the cemetery, talkin' to the dirt
 I'd rather die like a man than live like a coward
 There's a ghetto up in Heaven and it's ours
 "Black Power!" is what we scream
 As we dream in a paranoid state
 And our fate is a lifetime of hate
 Dear Mama, can you save me? And fuck peace
 'Cause the streets got our babies, we gotta eat
 No more hesitation, each and every black male's trapped
 And they wonder why we suicidal running 'round strapped.

Makaveli the Don Killuminati: The 7 Day Theory is the fifth studio album released by Tupac Shakur and the last album recorded by Tupac when he was alive. The album was recorded in August 1996, one month prior to Tupac's murder and released eight weeks later on November 5, 1996. The album was released under his new moniker Makaveli which sparked numerous rumors on whether Tupac faked his death, like Italian political figure Niccolo Machiavelli. Historically, Niccolo Machiavelli is known for faking his death and then reappearing seven days later to take revenge on his detractors. Additionally, the name Killuminati which appears as part of the album title mocks the secret society known as the Illuminati. The Illuminati is purported to be a secret elite society that wields extraordinary power and influence in business, government, and in the

entertainment industry. Moreover, the Illuminati is rumored to be the driving force behind the rise and fall of an entertainer's career in the entertainment industry. Bay Area rapper MC Manus confirmed this in a heart to heart conversation with Tupac during the recording of *Makaveli the Don Killuminati: The 7 Day Theory*:

I could feel his pain. He was committed to life even though he used to say he was 'commuted' He was set on slanging the bullshit that goes down, but people was tryin' to get him away from the real. I seen this happen to rapper before and told him. He said, 'I know Mack, you the king of thieves,' and I said "Blood, let me tell you the future with Death Row in a minute or less. I'll tell you what comes next. They moguls, man, and the moguls want a human sacrifice. They see a young rapper out here wantin' to make money and they say 'Look at that nigga. He is young, he is hungry---he's perplexed. That's what they say. And they take away the best years of your life. You might think it's all in good fun. But it is up to you to keep your shit clean – get your shit together – if you want to laugh at them in the end. If I were you, I would change my name again. They don't' care what they do to you, believe me."²⁸

M.C. Manus's heart to heart talk with Tupac suggests that Tupac was being forced to move away from the socio-political music that made him famous at the beginning of his career. It is clear that *Makaveli the Don Killuminati: The 7 Day Theory* is a vast departure from Tupac's previous work. On *Makaveli the Don Killuminati: The 7 Day Theory* album, Tupac is vicious and seems to allow his emotions to lead him into the fabricated East Coast West Coast feud. The song selected for analysis from *Makaveli the Don Killuminati: The 7 Day Theory* is "White Man's World." This song stands out from many of the gangsta oriented themes found on the album. In "White Man's World," there

²⁸ Armond White. *Rebel for the Hell of It: The Life of Tupac Shakur*. (New York: NY, Thunder's Mouth Press, 1997), 167.

are several themes from the Ten Point Program that are worthy of discussion such as Freedom and Self Determination, Full Employment, Education about Black History & the Decadent Nature of American Society, Liberation of Black Prisoners, and Land, Bread, Housing, Education, Clothing, Justice and Peace / United Nations Plebiscite

The song is reminiscent of Tupac's earlier work and it is evident that he is a child of two Black Panthers. "White Manz World" is a Black nationalistic rap song in which Tupac Shakur issues a roundup call to Black America to provide his rendition of a state of the union address to Black America but one that is tailored for the Black masses or lumpen proletariat. At the onset, there is a sample from the movie *Malcolm X*. Malcolm Little is in his prison cell straightening his hair when a Nation of Islam member interrupts with a piercing question, "What makes you ashamed of bein' Black?" Additionally, throughout the song, the listeners hear Tupac repeating the chorus "being Black in this white man's world." It is also quite apparent in the song that Tupac is quite proud of his African American heritage and that he not only loves being Black, he also wants Black people to love Black people and being Black. The lyrics in the song that bear witness to this are:

All my ghetto motherfuckers, be proud to be black if you proud to have this shit like this, 'cause ain't nobody got it like this (all my little black seeds, born black in the white man's world). All these motherfuckers wanna be like us. They all wanna be like us, to be the have-nots: all hail.

Moreover, in the interlude of "White Manz World," the audience hears Tupac acknowledge the marginalization of women in American society and specifically the

marginalization of Black women by Black men. This is important because the Black Panther Party was one of the few Black nationalistic groups in its era that directly addressed the equality of women within the ranks of its organization. There were many women who ascended to leadership positions within the Black Panther Party such as Elaine Brown, Kathleen Cleaver, and Tupac's own mother, Afeni Shakur. Elaine Brown served as the Chairperson of the Black Panther Party (1974 -1977). Kathleen Cleaver was the Communications Secretary and the first woman in a decision-making role within the party. Afeni Shakur was the section leader and Communication Secretary of the Harlem chapter of the Black Panther Party. In "White Man's World," Tupac is telling his listeners that it is difficult to be a woman in a world ruled by men and it is especially hard to be a Black woman because of racism and sexism. Below is an example of how Tupac's lyrics address the marginalization of women in American society, particularly Black women:

Nothin' but love for you, my sister
 Might even know how hard it is, no doubt
 Bein' a woman, a black woman at that, no doubt
 Shit, in this white man's world
 Sometimes we overlook the fact
 That we be ridin' hard on our sisters
 We don't be knowin' the pain we be causin'
 In this white man's world
 In this white man's world
 I ain't sayin I'm innocent in all this
 I'm just sayin', in this white man's world
 This song is for y'all
 For all those times that I messed up, or we messed up.

Tupac is also suggesting that although Black men subjugate Black women, it is difficult for most people to survive and thrive in a system that is dominated, controlled,

and run by white men unless they are white males. In verses one and two of “White Manz World,” Tupac addresses this by indirectly stating that today attainment of full employment or point two of the Ten Point Program is an unmet need for legions of Black Americans. Specifically, in the song lyrics, Tupac raps about how difficult it is to make it financially and that as a Black man he has to “beg or borrow” in order meet the financial demands that are necessary to sustain his family. The song lyrics that address the need for Full Employment, point two are:

Dear sister, got me twisted up in prison, I miss ya
 Cryin', lookin' at my niece's and my nephew's picture
 They say don't let this cruel world get ya
 Kinda suspicious, swearin' one day you might leave me
 For somebody that's richer
 Twist the cap off the bottle, I take a sip and see tomorrow
 Gotta make it if I have to beg or borrow.

Tupac also apologizes for Black male subjugation of Black women in the last lines of verse one along with acknowledging the Black struggle and the need for those within the Black nation to unify as a self-determined people. The lines within this verse echo sentiments of Black Nationalism. The Black Panther Party's “revolutionary nationalism” encompassed and eclipsed cultural nationalism by insisting that Blacks also had to be willing to “pick up the gun.” The lines within “White Manz World” that are suggestive of Black unification and nationalism are below:

Apologies to my true sisters, far from bitches
 Help me raise my Black nation, reparations are due
 It's true, caught up in this world I took advantage of you
 So tell the babies how I love them, precious boys and girls
 Born black in this white man's world—and all I heard was

In verse two of “White Man’s World ” Tupac speaks to the need for full employment by illustrating the effects of poverty and the socio-economic issues that often exist in areas where individuals live in economically challenged communities that are filled with violence and high crime rates.

Bein' born with less, I must confess
 Only adds on to the stress
 Two gunshots to my homie's head, died in his vest
 Shot him to death and left him bleedin' for his family to see
 I pass his casket, gently askin', is there a heaven for G's?
 My homeboy's doin' life, his baby mama be stressin'
 Sheddin' tears when her son finally ask that questions
 Where my daddy at? Mama, why we live so poor?

Moreover, Tupac also makes it clear that there is a sharp demarcation between the haves and have nots. In his song lyrics, Tupac vociferously proclaims, "You're out of touch with reality! There are a few of you in a few smoke-filled rooms, calling that the mainstream, while the masses of the people—white and black, red, yellow and brown, poor and vulnerable—are suffering in this nation."

With respect to self-determination, throughout “White Manz World,” the song lyrics discuss the need for Black people to have Black pride. In verse three, Tupac makes statements about the resiliency of Black people and encourages them to be persistent. His lyrics state this below:

Never that, in this white man's world, they can't stop us
 We've been here all this time
 They ain't took us out, they can never take us out
 No matter what they say, about us bein' extinct
 About us bein' endangered species
 We ain't never gon' leave this

We ain't never gon' walk off this planet
Unless y'all choose to.

“White Manz World” also calls for all political prisoners to be liberated. In one of the rifts found in the song, Tupac recounts the litany of political prisoners who were former Black Panthers or Black Liberation Army members that are still serving time in prison for political reasons. In point eight of the Ten Point Program, the Black Panther Party called for America to liberate its political prisoners. Tupac powerfully echoes these sentiments by demanding that political prisoners such as Mumia Abu-Jamal, Mutulu Shakur, Ruchell Mageem, Geronimo Pratt, and Eusi Zulu Heshima be freed:

We must fight for brother Mumia
We must fight for brother Mutulu
And we must fight for brother Ruchell Magee
We must fight for brother Geronimo Pratt
We must fight for Eusi Zulu Heshima
We must fight for the countless political prisoners
Who are locked up falsely by this white man.

In his final rift, Tupac gives a shout out to his teachers. These are the men who gave Tupac his political education. In his rap lyrics, Tupac apprises the audience with his teachers who all happen to be Black Panthers. Undoubtedly, these are the men who informed Tupac about the repercussions of being a Black man in America and how to fight oppression and racism via their life example. Tupac identifies his teachers in the lyrics below:

Born black, in this white man's world, no doubt
And it's dedicated to my motherfuckin' teachers
Mutulu Shakur, Geronimo Pratt, Mumia Abu Jamal
Sekou Odinga, all the real OG's, we out.

Tupac also teaches his listeners about the true history of American society with respect to how Black and Brown people have been subjugated by the white establishment (point five of the Ten Point Program). He does this by including a sound bite from Nation of Islam leader, Minister Louis Farrakhan. The speech Tupac included was one that was given by Louis Farrakhan at the Million Man March in 1995. The portion of Louis Farrakhan's keynote speech that Tupac included in "White Man's World" is below:

The seal, and the constitution, reflect the thinking of the founding fathers, that this was to be a nation by white people and for white people; Native Americans, Blacks, and all other non-white people were to be the burden bearers, for the real citizens of this nation.

Lastly, Tupac issues a call for reparations reminiscent of point ten of the Ten Point Program's call for a United Nations supervised plebiscite. Initially, the ultimate goal of the Black Panther Party was for Black Americans to be a sovereign people within the United States. In the essay, "Every Nation Struggling to be Free has a Right to Struggle, a Duty to Struggle," Geronimo Pratt explains that the United Nations plebiscite was the epitome of democracy because the Panthers wanted our people to be independent and they did not trust the United States government. Additionally, the Black Panther Party believed that the people would ultimately determine where the plebiscite would be located. Point ten of the Ten Point Program stated the following:

We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace. And as our major political objective, a United Nations-supervised plebiscite to be held throughout the black colony in which only black colonial subjects will be allowed

to participate for the purpose of determining the will of black people as to their national destiny.²⁹

Through all of his contradictions, Tupac seems to have believed in Black nationalism. Repeatedly, he encouraged Black people to band together to create their own nation: “Help me raise my Black nation, reparations are due.” Tupac’s lyrics also suggest that Black people are a nation within a nation and that they need to work to build it for themselves. The Panthers believed that because Black Americans have worked for free as former slaves for over two hundred year that they - like the Jews in the Holocaust - are deserving of reparations.

Digging still deeper into the musical history of Tupac Shakur and preceding the release of his debut album *2Pacalypse Now*, there is a myriad of evidence that suggests that his political ideology was heavily rooted in the political ideology of the Black Panther Party. Take for example, the song “Panther Power.” This song is found on the album *Beginnings: The Lost Tapes 1988 – 1991* “Panther Power” was recorded by Tupac when he was about eighteen years of age and a member of the rap group Strictly Dope that was managed by Leila Steinberg. Tupac referred to himself as MC New York during this epoch of his life.

“Panther Power” includes several tenets of the Ten Point Program. The song is a compilation rap song with Tupac and Ray Luv, another rapper in Strictly Dope. Ray Luv is featured in verse two of the song. In Luv’s verse, he praises the Black Panther Party for

²⁹ Philip S. Foner, ed. *The Black Panthers Speak* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), 3.

their strength, might and indomitable spirit. Luv also raps about how the American Dream is a façade for Black people. Referring to it as the American Nightmare, he recounts intimidation, segregation and Ku Klux Klan terrorism directed at Black Americans. Luv ends by exhorting Blacks to use their “panther power” to bring about freedom and equality. This is the first of the Black Panther Party’s Ten Points: “We Want Freedom. We Want Power to Determine the Destiny of Our Black Community.” Below is an excerpt from Luv’s verse:

Go toe to toe with a panther and you just can't win
 Suffered fame bats suppressed the rest
 The rich get richer and the poor take less
 The American Dream was an American nightmare
 You kept my people down and refuse to fight fair
 The Klu Klux Klan tried to keep us out
 Besides drew they know no blacks allowed
 With intimidation and segregation was a way for our freedom
 But now were impatient
 Blacks the other skin: dead or sell outs
 Freedom, equality, then I'll yell out
 "Don't you ever be ashamed of what you are
 It's ya panther power that makes you a star,"
 Panther power.

Let’s turn now to Tupac Shakur’s “Panther Power” verses. Tupac functions as a modern-day griot who tells the story of the American Dream from an African American point of view. Within the context of the Black American experience, Tupac sees a dream deferred. Tenets five and ten of the Ten Point Program seem to direct his lyrics. Point five calls for education while point ten calls for land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace. Tupac’s call for education dominates both of his verses. In verse one, he becomes the critical historian correcting distorted history by chastising “Lady Liberty”

and exposing the American dream as a “scheme” to re-enslave Black people. Note how this is prefigured in Point 5 where the Black Panther Party envisioned an educational system that will give to Black people “a knowledge of self.” Co-founder, Huey Newton also emphasizes the importance the Panthers weighed on education when he stated that the main purpose of the Black Panther Party was to “raise the consciousness of the masses through educational programs and other activities.”³⁰ Newton also reiterated that the Black Panther Party must “awaken the masses” in order to teach them how to strategically resist the power structure and to survive the system’s retaliation.³¹ Tupac’s verse one rap lyrics reflect the Panther sentiments:

As real as it seems the American Dream
Ain't nothing but another calculated scheme
To get us locked up shot up back in chains
To deny us of the future rob our names
Kept my history of mystery but now I see
The American Dream wasn't meant for me
Cause lady liberty is a hypocrite she lied to me
Promised me freedom, education, equality
Never gave me nothing but slavery.

As this verse progresses, Tupac specifically conveys how Blacks have been denied knowledge about their history and cultural heritage with his line, “Fathers of our country never cared for me/They kept my ancestors shackled up in slavery/And Uncle Sam never did a damn thing for me/Except lie about the facts in my history.” In verse

³⁰ Huey P. Newton, “The Correct Handling of a Revolution: July 20, 1967,” in *The Huey P. Newton Reader*, edited by David Hilliard and Donald Weise (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002), 143.

³¹ Newton, 143.

three, Tupac offers his listeners a short pithy remark of how Black Americans have been robbed of their ancestral heritage, specifically their names. Collectively, Tupac's lyrics in verses one and three proclaim the history of American Blacks as a people who were enslaved, lost their cultural heritage and were later given promises of freedom, equality, and education that have yet to be fulfilled for the masses. His rhymed verse teaches the true history of Black people and their status in the present-day American society.

Additionally, in verses one and three Tupac indirectly addresses point ten of the Ten Point Program. In point ten of the Ten Point Program, the Black Panther Party stated that they wanted land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice, and peace. For example, when Tupac states, "Cause lady liberty is a hypocrite she lied to me/Promised me freedom, education, equality/ Never gave me nothing but slavery," he is affirming that Blacks have not received an adequate and true education. He also condemns inequality and injustice: "Promised me emancipation in this new nation/All you ever gave my people was starvation and have not been treated justly in America." His starvation reference echoes point ten's call for "bread" to feed the masses. The lack of employment to meet the needs of the people is also raised by Tupac in the line, " So now I'm sitting here mad cause I'm unemployed/But the government's glad cause they enjoyed/When my people are down so they can screw us around." Tupac's line "Time to change the government now panther power" found in the first and last verses is reminiscent of the Black Panther Party's call for a totally new government. In verse three, this climaxes with the lines as follows:

Couldn't survive in this capitalistic

Government cause it was meant to hold us back
Using ignorant, drugs, to sneak attack
In my community, they killed the unity
But when I charged them, tried to claim immunity
I strike America like a case of heart disease
Panther power is running through my arteries
Try to stop oh boy you'll be clawed to death
Cause I'll be fighting for my freedom with my dying breath.

After reviewing Tupac's lyrics, it is clear that he is politically rooted in the ideology of the Black Panther Party. At the time of the recording of "Panther Power," Tupac served as the national chairman of the New African Panther's youth organization. "Panther Power's" lyrics strongly suggest that Tupac believed in fighting injustice, especially in the line, "I strike America like a case of heart disease/Panther power is running through my arteries/Try to stop oh boy you'll be clawed to death/Cause I'll be fighting for my freedom with my dying breath." His alignment with and commitment to articulate the ideology of the Black Panther Party in the face of injustice seems to be clarified when he states that "Panther power is running through my arteries." Tupac is telling his audience here that at heart, he is a Black Panther.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The goal of this research was to assess the impact of the Black Power Movement upon the political hip hop music of Tupac Shakur. The Black Panther Party was selected as the organization to use for this study because it left the world with the Ten Point Program as its ideology and also it was widely regarded as the vanguard of the Black Power movement. Moreover, the Ten Point Program is a quantifiable ideology that can be easily examined and accessed to determine if any of its tenets exist as themes within the hip hop song lyrics of Tupac Shakur.

In this study six studio albums by Tupac Amaru Shakur from the Golden Era of Hip Hop were examined with a minimum of one song from each album and no more than two songs per album were selected for analysis. A total of seven songs were selected in this study in order to determine to what extent the ideology of the Black Panther Party exists in Tupac's music as found in the Ten Point Program.

The selected songs along with the albums in which the songs appear are "Trapped" and "Wordz of Wisdom" from *2Pacalypse Now*, 1991, "Holler If Ya Hear Me" from *Strictly 4 My N.I.G.G.A.Z.*, 1993, "Me Against the World" from *Me Against the World*, 1995, "Only God Can Judge Me" from *All Eyez on Me*,

1996, “White Man’z World” from *The Don Killuminati: The Seven Day Theory*, 1996, and “Panther Power” from *Beginnings: The Lost Tapes 1988 – 1991*. While this work has been based on a content analysis of Tupac’s music and has revealed aspects of Tupac’s revolutionary political ideology, there needs to be an oral history research project to further explore the political ideology of Tupac Shakur and its intersection with the Black Panther Party’s ideology. Interviews with Tupac Shakur while he lived did not focus on Tupac’s political and social activism in any significant detail. An oral history project would allow narratives to unfold and be reconstructed to illuminate Tupac’s political work. Some areas that would be beneficial would include Tupac’s political work as a New Afrikan Panther as well his activist work in organizing gangs and helping the youth. An oral history project would augment the conclusions drawn from the content analysis that this research conducted via examining the lyrical content of Tupac’s studio albums. This analysis determined that there are four consistent themes in Tupac Shakur’s socially conscious music:

- Highlighting economic and social struggles of the Black poor living in America particularly young Black men and single Black mothers.
- Promoting self-defense in the face of police brutality and harassment.
- Encouraging Black people to resist cultural domination and race and class oppression by becoming knowledgeable about their history and fighting even to the point of armed rebellion.

- Promoting Black nationalism and racial pride for African Americans without bigotry toward other ethnicities.

Of course, the key question for this research was whether Tupac's lyrics addressed the tenets found in the Black Panther Party's Ten Point Program. The abbreviated answer is yes. Key among the Ten Point Program tenets reflected in Tupac's lyrics were for self-determination, full employment, ending exploitation of Blacks by Whites (or Capitalists), decent housing, police brutality, education, liberation of Black prisoners, the demand for land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice, peace, and a United Nations plebiscite. Consistent with the Black Panther focus, Tupac's lyrical discourse often spoke directly to the Black underclass. Called the lumpen proletariat by the Panthers, they envisioned this group to be potentially the most revolutionary. Listening to Tupac Shakur's politically oriented songs reveals that he had a love for Black America and a deep commitment to promoting their uplift.

Consequently, the political music of Tupac Shakur is Black nationalistic music that seeks to awaken the masses to define, preserve, uplift, and defend the Black nation. Tupac Shakur's invocation of Black nationalist themes is also consistent with the framework of domestic colonialism (internal colonialism) that was advanced in the late 1960s by Black militants such as Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael), Charles Hamilton, Eldridge Cleaver, and scholars such as psychologist Kenneth Clark and social theorist, Harold Cruse. These thinkers assessed the conditions in Black America and argued that Blacks Americans were a nation within a nation. As a nation within a nation, they must

become empowered and take control of their communities. Notably, this research shows that Tupac Shakur's political rap lyrics are a response to domestic colonialism and reflect the key ideological aspects of the Black Panther Party's Ten Point Program and Platform.

Moreover, the scholarly literature on Tupac Shakur affirms the findings. Scholars such as Karin L. Stanford posited that Tupac's political ideology is rooted in Black nationalism, particularly Black Power as articulated by the Black Panther Party. Specifically Stanford suggested that Tupac used hip hop culture as a mechanism to awaken the Black masses and invoke political awareness.¹ One may argue that Tupac Shakur was only a rapper, but it is clear that Tupac Shakur used his voice through hip hop music to inspire the masses toward resistance and fearlessly opposing oppression. Jeremy Prestholdt has also noted Tupac's worldwide appeal and cites instances where Tupac's music and image have been used to support revolutionary action.

Seven-year-old Tupac Shakur once stated that he wanted to be a revolutionary when he grew up. Later as a successful hip hop artist and actor, he proclaimed to the world that even if he did not change the world, he would definitely be the spark that would invoke change.² In this researcher's opinion, Tupac Amaru Shakur fulfilled this mission. Tupac Amaru Shakur and the Black Panthers taught Black people to resist, unify, and fight. They supplied America with the blueprint. The revolution is now left for

¹ Karin L. Stanford. "Keepin' It Real in Hip Hop Politics: A Political Perspective of Tupac Shakur," *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 42, no. 1, (January 2011): 15.

² *Tupac Resurrection: In His Own Words Special Collection's Edition*, CD-ROM (MTV Networks and Amaru Entertainment, Inc.), 2003.

the people to invoke when the conditions become ripe for it to occur. All Power to the People!

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